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Rosemary for Remembrance

CLIFFORD BAX

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ROSEMARY
FOR REMEMBRANCE

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ROSEMARY FOR REMEMBRANCE

BY

CLIFFORD BAX

LONDON
FREDERICK MULLER LTD.
29 GREAT JAMES STREET, W.C.1

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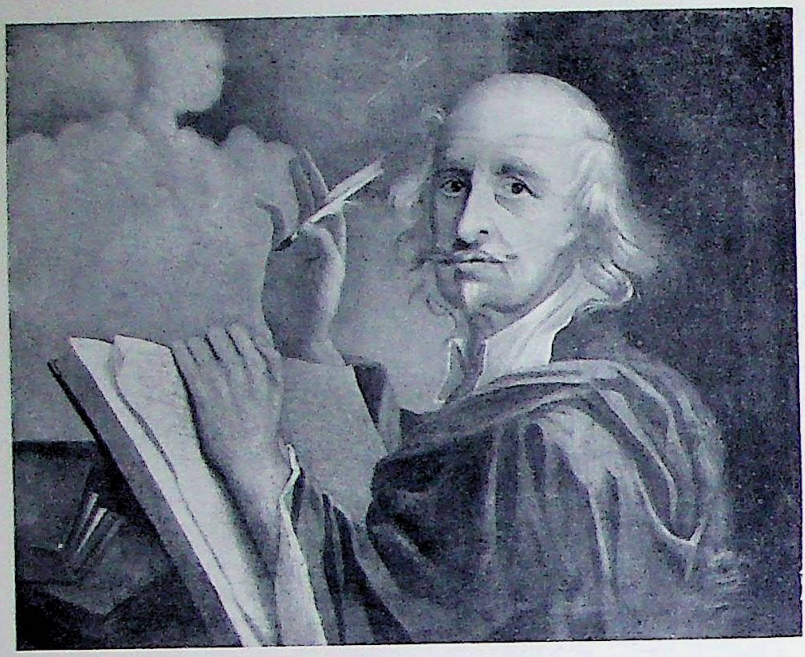

QUESTO RETRATTO RAPPRESENTA EL GRANDE POETA ENGLESE GULIELMO SCESPIRIO ET FU DEPINTO DAL GRANDE PITTORE FIAMINGO FRANCESCO HALS. DITTO RETRATTO FU PORTATO A ROMA DAL CONTE DE NITHSDALE, GULIELMO MAXWELL, ET DAL MEDESIMO DONATO AL MONASTERO DE SANTO GREGORIO SUL MONTE CELIO A ROMA.
LORD GULIELMO MAXWELL PER CAUSA CHE FU PARTIGIANO DE LA CASA STUART, FU RACCHIUSO NE LA TORE DE LONDRA ET SENTENTIATO PER LA TESTA. ESSENDO PERÓ EVASO DA LA PRIGIONIA CON HABITO DE FEMINA, CON LA CONSORTE VIENSE A ROMA, INDOVE TENNE CASA VIVETTE IN PACE ET MORETTE SEMPRE FIDELE ALLO SUO PRENCEPE STUART

PORTRAIT OF MR. W.S.

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TO THOSE FRIENDS
WHO ARE NAMED IN THE CHAPTER
CALLED "M-DAY"

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Chapter One

FAIRY HOUSEKEEPER

I

EVERYBODY must wish that there were still a few undiscovered countries or at least a few charming and virginal islands. The invention of the aeroplane has finally despoiled our planet. Even the thickest jungles of Burma may now be pried into, and there will soon be little to choose between Bali and Balham. That is why it is so difficult not to envy Captain Cook; and talking of Captain Cook, how expressly he supports my contention that in the eighteenth century anybody who could write at all seems to have written well: but although there are no new places for a man to explore, there are plenty of undiscovered personalities, and every personality is an island of memories, affections and hopes. I agree that many personalities are dry and featureless and that, having taken a look at them, we do well to get back to the boat and resume our voyage of adventure; but I am now inviting the reader to put in at a personality which was rare, attractive and not a little puzzling.

Toward the end of my sojourn in Cambridge I had a housekeeper who was conceited, sour and bow-legged. When I announced that I should soon be going back to Albany she decided not to risk the perils of London, and it was then that by an extremely fine stroke of luck I replaced her with a housekeeper who was young, very small and uncommonly pretty. Sheila Fay's life was clouded only by two troubles; the one, that her soldier-husband was a man of perfect character but of no ambition, the other that

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she was, in her own phrase, "five foot nothing, I expect", and even here she may have been exaggerating by an inch or two. Indeed, she gave an impression of having stopped growing at the age of twelve or thirteen, and it will be for my fellow-adventurer to determine as he peruses the evidence whether at the same crucial period Sheila also stopped growing emotionally. There was no doubt that she had never realised how the childlike form of her face and figure were a powerful attraction to most men. Nobody had explained to her that she represented one of the dream-women in the deeps of the male imagination—that is to say, the elf-woman who has strayed from some kingdom east of the sun, west of the moon. Unlike Amaryllis,[1] she was fair. Her nose was delicately shaped and almost classical, her mouth had the flower-like form of a small child's, her teeth were so pretty as to astonish any new acquaintance, and her eyes were large, candid and of a pearl-grey tint like the earliest dawnlight over a rippling summer sea. Maturity (for Sheila proved to be thirty years old) had given a certain sturdiness to her shoulders and a comely roundness to her limbs. As for her feet, they were so miniature that sometimes people would smile with amusement if they caught sight of her empty shoes.

I soon learned the outlines of her existence as, for example, that Ernie, the unambitious husband, was a wine-waiter when he was not a fighting man in Libya, and that they had two children—boys—who, it seemed, were actually life-size. Moreover, Sheila's mother, a sick woman, did not dislike the sordid by-street in which she was then living. Perhaps, I reflected, she, like her son-in-law, is unambitious. . . .

On the day of our leaving Cambridge the usual giants in green baize aprons duly dismantled my rooms, and by lunchtime it was obvious that Sheila and I would have to take our meal in the kitchen, eating whatever rations we

[1] *Evenings in Albany*: chapter xii.

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had retained and using whatever implements the giants had overlooked. Presently I remarked to Sheila, "Do you know, Mrs. Fay, I cannot quite make you out. . . . You have been living in a slum and your mother doesn't find it uncongenial, but where, then, did you acquire your fine little nose and your pretty manners?"

"Believe it or not," she replied, gashing open a tin of sardines, "my father, an Irishman, was a solicitor, but he came down in the world and he ended up as a Post Office checker of foreign parcels. Furthermore," she continued, "it wasn't his fault, it wasn't drink, for example, and if only Mother had been more ambitious . . ."

"The Irish solicitor explains a good deal," I said. "He explains why you have used so rare a word as 'furthermore'."

She laughed, and then went on to say in her prattling style, "Mother was a barmaid in Shropshire, and she was eating her heart out because of some boy-friend who had jilted her, and she wrote to the firm of brewers who owned The King William, asking them to give her a post somewhere as far away as possible from the boy-friend. You could understand that? So they sent her to Dublin. . . ."

"Are brewers so human?" I expostulated.

"Of course, in those days," Sheila babbled, "Mother was something of a beauty, only she worries, you know, and she hasn't worn well. . . ."

I could see very clearly what had happened in order that Sheila Fay should be born. The impulsive young solicitor, at the beginning of his career, had gone out one evening in heady April, perhaps, but anyway during one of the halcyon years that came just before the First World War in 1914, and he had looked at the new and exotic barmaid from England and had at once romanticised her—Dublin was then a city of poets—and she, so far as I could gather, had been unable to keep up with him. . . . "One evening," Sheila was telling me, "Mother overheard some of Father's friends discussing her in a corner. They thought she

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couldn't hear and it hurt her dreadfully. One of them was saying 'Flaxen hair, olive skin, dark lashes, but she's only a flower-girl beauty.' After that, Mother would never go out with any of his friends; to their houses, I mean, because, she said, his grand acquaintances would despise her." I admit that this little story of long ago made me recall the poet's line

Alas, how hard is happiness,

but Sheila seemed not to be much aware of the *lachrymae rerum*, and, in order to sustain the gay mood of our lunch, I observed that her parents might not have achieved a triumphant marriage but had certainly invented the most delightful of housekeepers. It was then that for the first time I actually saw somebody throw her head back, showing a throat without a wrinkle, and laugh—as people did in old novels.

Our second course consisted of mousetrap cheese, and I noticed that she was holding one plate with her fingers and the other along her forearm.

"That looks very professional," I said.

"Oh," she answered, "you soon learn how to do it if you're in the catering business."

I wondered if all waiters and waitresses talk of being, like Lipton or Lyons, in the catering business: but while I was relishing the phrase she began to talk about her school-time and how the headmistress always chose her to act the leading part in the school plays. "Just fairy stories, mostly," Sheila explained, "but they were nearly always in poetry, and I love poetry. Once we did *Midsummer Night's Dream*. I expect you know it. . . ."

"You played Puck?"

"No, I was Titania, but alas! I had to leave school when I was fourteen because father died. I wish I'd been properly educated, but it's no good worrying. . . ."

"So at fourteen you went into the catering business?"

"Yes, at the Imperial, that's in Peterborough," she replied, and added abruptly, "It isn't silly to love poetry,

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is it! I used to listen whenever I could to the poetry-reading at midnight on the air, but Ernie and Mother said it was all stuff-an'-nonsense. 'There she is', they would say, 'off into fairyland again.' . . . "

"You're an odd little person, Mrs. Fay," I began, but at this moment she once more threw back her head and laughed, saying "No! I'm quite ordinary. There are thousands and thousands of me in the world and nobody would miss me for longer than a week if I was bumped off one stormy night, and would you mind calling me 'Sheila' because I've always detested having to be Mrs. Anybody." And yet, I reflected, it was precisely upon that altar of bourgeois respectability that poor Mrs. Thompson sacrificed Bywaters, her husband and herself.

"Father was very fond of me," mused Sheila. "In fact, he would have spoiled me, I'm sure, if he had lived. I was there when he died, you see he had asked for me specially, and it was a Saturday morning in February, and he took my hand and I heard him saying, 'They've a fine day for the football match.' Then he shut his eyes, and presently the nurse came in and she said, 'He's gone.' . . . But you will get tired of my talking, and we've such a lot to do, haven't we? Ernie is always saying, 'Don't mince away at your food. Get on with it!'"

II

We went to London, and Sheila, who was nobody's image of a housekeeper, provoked an audible murmur among the long-established domestics in Albany. It was obvious, too, that her diurnal visit to the shops was a triumphal progress in miniature, and she would always bring me dramatic accounts of what had happened.

On one occasion our butcher observed, "Well, everybody spoils you, so I suppose I must, too." Certainly she was a constant delight to me, partly because I was in the

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dusty fifties and would find myself watching with sad appreciation the youthfulness of her movements, the sunny head, the toylike figure with its lifted arms when she came in to close or to unclose the curtains, and the grave intent expression with which she hoovered the carpet or dusted the dining-table. She might have been piously dusting the Parthenon. I also liked her lack of class-consciousness. There was, for example, a morning when Sheila decided to clean the parquet surround of my living-room and while she was down there, on hands and knees, polishing away, she told me merrily how one of the staidest of Albany housekeepers had hinted that Sheila had never done a full day's work in her life. "As I was telling you, the other day," she warbled, "after Father's death I had to go out to work, we had hardly a shilling in the flat, so I took a job at the Imperial as a commis and I got about four-and-sixpence a day, which I always took back to Mother. . . ."

"But what is a commis?" I asked, inserting my query edgeways. Then, of course, I conceived that it meant working not for a wage but on a commission basis.

"Oh, no," cried Sheila, "it means the opposite. A commis gets higher wages than a waitress but mustn't expect tips. And my duty," she continued, "was to push a trolley of fancy cakes, but after about eight months I was promoted and I had two tables of my own. I was very proud of them, as you can imagine, and I was determined to satisfy the manager, but now and again there was trouble with some of the customers. Once a Jew came with a rather tawdry girl-friend and it was a Saturday, our busiest afternoon, but he wouldn't wait to be served, I suppose he was showing off, so he grabbed my arm and shouted that he wasn't used to being kept waiting. I said that I'd come back as soon as I could, but he got up and stalked off and reported me for impertinence. I almost cried for rage when the manager told me to apologise! Oh, and there were other men who would follow me on to the evening tram and

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catch my legs as I climbed to the upper deck. One of them said that he was a band-leader, which is a big thing in our world, and he always drove up to the Imperial in a sports-car and soon discovered which was my free evening and, sure enough, just as I was going off duty he called to me from his car and asked if he might take me home."

"You were too young to be suspicious?" I asked. "Or were his attentions strictly honourable?"

"Of course they weren't!" cooed Sheila, getting up from the floor and attending to the mantelpiece. "He began by driving in the wrong direction and when I complained, he said, 'It's a runaway match, Sheila, I'm going to marry you'. Think of it, Mr. Bax, and me without nightdress or toothbrush! He must have been crazy but it all ended simply enough. . . ."

"How?"

"When he came to the traffic lights he had to pull up, and I jumped out of the car, without thanking him."

These little glimpses of a waitress's life interested me so much that I soon suggested to Sheila that she should take her meals with me, an arrangement which was in accord with the friendly spirit of wartime. As a child she had read a version of *The Arabian Nights* and was therefore able to catch the allusion when I remarked one day, "If ever you come to supper without a story to amuse me, I shall have you beheaded or at least shall give you notice." To this she answered, "I shall never leave you unless you *do* give me notice!" And how could she be expected to foresee her future?

It was not long before a person so well-charged with natural attraction made new friends or was visited by old friends, and within a few weeks my housekeeper was spending much of her time at a small club in the West End. It was called Marco's. Once I asked her if Ernie would at all dislike the rapidity with which she collected admirers, and her answer was, "Ernie's grand. He never criticises."

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"And wouldn't you mind," I continued, "if Ernie were always running about with a new girl-friend?"

"Mind?" said Sheila. "I only wish he would. In a way, you know, he's too perfect. I mean, it's ridiculous for a man to be away for two years and not to have any fun at all with . . . but I can't change him, he'll always be the same, just loving *me* and nobody else."

Ernie, I reflected, is evidently a fine example of the monogamous man, but as for Sheila, is she promiscuous or is she cold? The boys whom she met seemed to entertain but never to excite her, and on two occasions already she had surprised me by saying, "He's in love! Isn't it silly!"

III

I had certainly not made her out and this was one good reason for proposing that we should take a walk in Saint James's Park. It was a genial bone-easing day of July, and for me there was all the pleasure of looking again at London after an exile of more than two years. "It is like meeting an old friend," said Robert de la Condamine, "and finding him on crutches and with sticking-plaster all over his poor face." So it was. London looked like a waiter in ill-fitting evening-dress. The Squares needed new paint, the women needed more leisure and more luxury. Even some of the prostitutes wore slacks: and the Park itself, once elegant, now looked war-weary. People trod on toes or bumped against shoulders without so much as the Englishman's curt "Sorry," and men at the Clubs would set the swing-door revolving at a speed which gravely imperilled the nose of the next-comer. I was, apparently, the only walker in London who looked where he was going.

As we were turning homeward past the old weathervane on the Admiralty (the one that James the Second watched so anxiously) Sheila said, I've never been in this park. Ernie swears by the one in Battersea and it's pretty, but here's the park I'll always love best. It has a feeling of

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happy events long ago." Then a few paces farther on, she reported that the night before, at Marco's, she had met Flo Ridgeway who, as I could remember, had once worked with Sheila as a waitress. Flo was not pretty and was not quite plain. I had always regarded her as a bold hussy, and no sooner had I confessed this to Sheila than she was away *prestissimo* upon one of her stories.

"Flo's not actually . . . but some people," she babbled, "will criticise a girl for even . . . and of course she *is* a bit wild, well, last time that she was up in London she stayed too late at Marco's and when she arrived at Liverpool Street the train to Cambridge had gone. So she walked round the station, it was about three in the morning and I *must* say I shouldn't much have liked, but she clicked with a soldier who'd also lost the last train. They found a canteen and had some coffee and afterwards they took breakfast together and in the end they caught the first train eastward. . . ."

"Did he live there," I interrupted, "or was this a brilliant inspiration?"

"Mr. Bax!" cried Sheila, mock-reproachful of my innocence. Then she continued, "The boy had five days' leave and he spent all of them in Flo's rooms. Rather dull, I should say, when she was working at the restaurant, and even if I was unmarried I wouldn't . . . but presently he said that he had to rejoin his regiment and would she lend him two pounds. . . ."

"He was having a successful holiday, wasn't he!"

"Believe it or not, he came back last week and he did refund the money." I admitted my astonishment. "Only," she went on, "two days ago when he again returned to his regiment he went off with her purse, nearly all her clothes, including undies, and a quite new pair of suede shoes, and he'd packed them in her best suitcase, and so that's gone too, but I'm afraid that while she was telling me all this (and how she does rattle on!) I was thinking of my evening-dress, it's the only one that I have and it was hanging up

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in Flo's wardrobe. However, I was born lucky, and he had left it behind, so I suppose he didn't think much of it!" There was no self-pity in her voice. I felt that if the soldier had in fact stolen her only party-dress she would have forgotten all about it in five or ten minutes.

The next of her tales was about a brief period of unsatisfactory employment, and I think it may have been inspired by my saying that to a writer unemployment is misery. "Ernie," she related, "is very particular about the sort of work that we accept but once when I was tired of having no job I thought I'd go out into the West End and see if anybody wanted a waitress. And I came across a club called The Flyaway Dragon—why, it's quite close to us here in Albany—but I wouldn't think that you'd know it. You see, it's . . . but anyway there was a green and gold commissionaire outside, twirling his moustache. I went up to him, he was as tall as you are, so I expect we looked rather amusing, and I said, 'Do they want any waitresses here?' and he said, 'Well, they do, and you can take it from me, little pet, that this is not such a shady dive as you probably think it is. And they pay well.' So I went in, and I marched up to the lady-receptionist who, of course, was drinking Manhattans with some of the members at the bar. She liked me and said I could start to-morrow, but when I told Ernie . . ."

"I thought he never criticised you. . . .?"

"But the Dragon was a mixed Club, unusually mixed, I mean."

"Unusually mixed? There aren't more than two sexes, are there? I have felt for a long while that this is a great drawback to life."

"All the women," Sheila stated, "were crazy about women and all the men were silly about men." I expressed some surprise that she with so guileless an expression should know anything of these abberations, and again she gave me a reproachful smile. "The members were always very nice to me," said Sheila, "even the boys, but I was never really

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happy there because of the goldfish. You see, there was a short marble pillar in the middle of the lounge and on the pillar stood a large bowl of water with goldfish in it, and some of the members thought it was great fun to tip their cocktails into the water . . ."

"You can't remember," I inquired, "what the fish thought?"

Sheila laughed and said, "That wasn't the worst of it, I assure you. The manager, quite a nice man normally, decided to send a current of electricity through the water and, of course, the electricity forced those poor fishes to go swimming round and round until they were mad, and sometimes I saw them straining desperately to swim against the current, but naturally they couldn't: and I always tried to go past them without looking, even although the members all laughed at me for being so faddy. And every morning the fishes were dead and new fishes were dropped into the bowl."

"I have always admired the culture," said I, "produced by our great public schools, universities and country houses."

IV

As the summer of 1943 proceeded, Sheila made new companions wherever she went. The American army was not unconscious of her allure, and the calfskin handbag, sent from Egypt by Ernie, was soon stuffed out with tickets of membership for various nightclubs. It was at the Gilded Cage that she met a man of thirty whose name was Isaac Rosencrantz, and he, as I gathered from her daily bulletins, was not a man to keep anything for himself. He was ready at any time, it seemed, to effect a quick turnover in any commodity, from gramophones to girls; and when he offered to introduce my housekeeper to Prince Byron, the great dance-band leader, with a view to starting her career as a crooner, I judged that probably he had his eye upon

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Street and get into Albany by the old steel door. At first I could not find Sheila. She was not in the kitchen, not in my living-room, not at the top of the stone stairs in her eyrie, and I feared that she must be out at one of her gay haunts, and in fancy I was already placing a wreath upon a small coffin when, going towards the bathroom, I heard through the bombardment and the counter-cannonade a splashing of water and a familiar voice crooning,

"Can't you believe, Boy,
I'm your Eve, Boy,
And say, don't every Adam
Need a Madam. . . ."

Presently she came out of the bathroom and was surprised to see me sitting under my reading-lamp. "Oh, no," she said, "I find it all rather exhilarating . . . you shouldn't have come back, you shouldn't!" Ten minutes later we were drinking tea together (for the Germans were still overhead) and Sheila said, "I was getting a bit anxious about *you*, if you want the truth: it can seem so sinister in the black-out." I was musing over the adroit use of that word "sinister" when she said with a smile, "I wonder if Budd hides from the bombs?" This led me naturally to ask for news of the boxer. And Sheila laughed. "Oh," she said, "I think he is on the run." This description of a defeated suitor so much amused me that I exclaimed, "You quaint child! You bring to mind a pretty poem that says,

'From you, dear Sheila, little troubles pass
Like little ripples down a sunny river;
Your pleasures spring like daisies in the grass
Cut down, and up again as blithe as ever.'"

Somewhat to my surprise the application of Landor's epigram to her own temperament delighted her, and from this I deduced that she could never be brought to understand why tragedy is more esteemed than comedy.

Soon afterwards the Germans fled back to their bases in France, and the night went silent, and my little housekeeper climbed up the stone stairs to her bed.

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V

It should not be supposed that Sheila's tales of hard-working life were finished. They still added interest to many a lunch or supper, and the best of all, though it was also the saddest, came to me last. As a rule, her table-talk was based on the amorous reactions of Englishmen, Americans, Poles, Dutch sailors, furtive Scots, and very Free Frenchmen. Hiram Bradley, an American captain of artillery, had, I understood, quite dislodged the luckless prizefighter, and this new swain immediately supplied her with enough "Camels" to enable her to cross the Gobi desert without yearning for a smoke.

One day shortly before Christmas I noticed that Sheila just dashed in breathlessly to prepare and serve my meals and at once dashed out again, despite rain, snow or fog. It seemed that somebody at The Wideawake on the previous night had stolen Captain Bradley's wallet: and this, like George the Third's jokes, was no laughing matter because the wallet had contained a hundred and twenty-five dollars, his identity papers, and a snapshot of his little daughter way back home. Sheila, far from sympathising with her latest cavalier, called him a silly fool for having taken so many dollars to a club called The Wideawake. However, it was she who had introduced him and so she felt responsible for his loss. Many an empty wallet has been found in the back-street underneath the water-closet window of The Wide-awake, the girls deftly depositing them there, but Hiram's wallet must be classed with the lost books of Livy.

Despite the increasing irregularity of my home-life, I still assumed that Sheila would stay with me until at least the end of the war, but during the Christmas week-end, while I was in the country, she was beguiled away from me by a glittering opportunity of getting quick money. Before she announced her imminent departure, however, there was an evening when for once in a way she sat at the supper table with me just as she had done so often in the bygone summer;

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and towards the end of our exiguous meal she said, lighting a Camel, "I am going to tell you something that will surprise you. Ernie is my second husband. When I was seventeen I married a man named Terence who was almost as bad as Ernie is good. He was huge, a stevedore, he worked on the docks, and we lived in a furnished room in Liverpool. . . ."

"Terence was Irish?"

"Very much so!" she replied.

"And how did you get rid of him—unmarry, I mean?"

"Oh," said Sheila, "he used to come back drunk and bring horrible women with him, so I ran away one afternoon and got a job in Southampton as a waitress. . . ."

"But you haven't answered my question," I persisted. "How did you dissolve the marriage so that you could live happily ever afterwards with Ernie?"

"About a year after I had left him," said Sheila, "I went into a shop in Southampton to have my hair waved, and while I was waiting, what else should I read in a newspaper than that Terence had been ordered to pay maintenance to some girl whom he'd got into trouble. So you see the divorce was easy."

"You certainly did begin life young," I commented. "Marriage at seventeen . . . but I ought not to be surprised at that. Was it happy at first? I hope so." The fact is, I was disappointed. The news was not a very exciting surprise. Sheila frowned at her cigarette as she momentarily pondered my question. Then she answered, "Yes, I suppose it was happy at first. You see I had a baby, and you know how fond I am of the two boys that I now have . . ."

"I know," said I, "that you have a keen sense of duty towards them," but she ignored my interpolation, being busy with strange memories, and continued, "I'm not one to go silly about babies; but this one, the one that I had with Terence, was, oh, you simply can't imagine how lovely he was, like roseleaves, a marvellous skin, and really

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the most exquisite features, but I can't describe him, especially as most babies are so plain when they're born. After a month he began to fade, that's the only way to put it, he faded like a flower, and the doctor couldn't understand what was happening. I sat up all night, willing him to live, and he wouldn't go on with his life; d'you think it's possible that some babies turn away from the taste of the world? No, I daresay that's nonsense. Well, one morning he died in my arms, but I did not know he had died and I went on carrying him about until Mrs. Good, that was our landlady downstairs, said, 'Sheila, don't you realise?' I couldn't, wouldn't 'realise'. I felt that if I hugged him close, he was bound to come back to me, and even the doctor couldn't make me give up my determination to revive him. Of course, in the end they took him away from me: and Terence made arrangements for the funeral...."

Sheila stubbed out her cigarette, got up from the table, as dry-eyed as a perspicacious reader will have expected, and was about to carry the plates downstairs to the kitchen when, sensing that she had left me with only the half of a story, she paused, put the plates on the sideboard, asked if she might take one of my cigarettes, and again sat down.

"I was terribly upset," she related, "and I wandered about that house like a ghost. I became so thin in those next three days that Mrs. Good got quite alarmed about me. And then came the afternoon of the funeral, and Terence seemed to assume that I should be there, but I said that I couldn't possibly go. Of course it had to start from our home, and a little while before the hearse arrived, Mrs. Good put her arm round me and said, 'I want you to come for a walk with me now, so that you won't be thinking', and of course I accepted. She led me away from the direction of the cemetery, and as we walked on and on, I felt as if my legs belonged to somebody else or to a doll (can you understand that?) and all the time I could see in my brain that little face and body, and I longed

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for the end of the day. But something strange must have happened. . . ."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Mrs. Good and I went on walking and trying to talk until we found ourselves going past a big motor-car shop and it had one of those wide plate-glass windows and somehow or other I glanced at the cars in the window, not that I could ever afford to buy one, and all of a sudden I was not looking at the cars. I was looking at a funeral procession in reflection, and I could see baby's hearse and the car in which Terrence was sitting, and the coffin looked so tiny. . . . They had come round *that* way because the road was up."

Then Sheila cleared away and very soon I heard her crooning softly over the sink.

"And doesn't every Adam
Need a madam . . ."

VI

When I came home from my Christmas week-end I learned that Captain Bradley's party had been hilarious and, as Sheila said, "very Bohemian"; but I was still so uncertain of her chemistry that I did not know how much or how little she implied by this word. Halfway through supper she smiled mischievously and then said, "Of course I shan't let you down, you know that, but I've been offered a post as dance-hostess at the Yellow Dragon and I'd like to take it, only of course I will carry on here also until you can find somebody to take my place. The manager says that I can easily make ten pounds—fifteen pounds—a week! Not that I believe him but . . ."

The manager, as she subsequently found, had not exaggerated her prospects, and it was through his cajolements that my association with Sheila came gradually to an end. Honourable to the last, she tried desperately to keep house for me although, once she had joined The Yellow Dragon,

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she was out from ten in the evening until four in the morning. In consequence she did not get up until the afternoon of the next day, a state of affairs which was heroic of her but cheerless for me. My breakfast for the next few weeks consisted of damp sandwiches and coffee from a thermos-flask; but I should not much have minded this discomfort if sometimes, hearing her footsteps tiptoeing homewards at four in the morning, I had not feared that The Yellow Dragon would inevitably destroy whatever had been fine within her. Strange stories flowed to me about The Dragon, as that one business man had bitten her shoulder, another had asked if she could arrange for him to be present at a Lesbian rite, and a woman guest had striven to implicate her in the theft of a gold wrist-watch from a drunken American colonel: but even a dubious night club in the fifth year of a soul-coarsening war seemed not to brush away more than a very little of the damask on Sheila's wings. Was it, I speculated, because she was so devoted to Ernie and the boys, or that long since she had looked into a still pool and had forever fallen in love?

Her successor was tall, angular, pleasant, bespectacled, and, believe it or not, as Sheila would have said, in 1899 she had made one in that famous chorus of five in *Floradora*. She stayed just long enough for my reference to one of her dishes as "the Floradora Grill" to become a safe winner between us, and whenever the joke came up again she would descend to Sheila's kitchen, happily savouring the Victorian excitements of long ago.

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Chapter Two

M-DAY

I

PERHAPS the most lyrical example of Jacob Epstein's earlier work is the well-known bronze called "Meum with a Fan". The model, it is true, has a charming and unforgettable name but there is also something attractive (I have always thought) in the informality of the title. It is as though the sculptor were saying to the public "I presume that by this time you know who Meum is and, anyway, a person so lovable requires no surname."

Now it happened that in 1934 this same Meum, after a stage career in which she never took part in a failure, suddenly abandoned the theatre, all the charm of London, all the stimulus of a great capital, and settled down in a remote and deep-browed homestead which for more than four hundred years had stood upon the Hertfordshire fringe of Essex. Here, by loving and persistent labour, she transformed a large wilderness into a varied and many-coloured garden, and here too she set up in business as a breeder of cocker-spaniels. Her new home had a queer name. It was called The Crump. Most people, I suppose, would think of a crump as a shell-hole, and they would not be completely astray. A crump, according to Webster's vast dictionary, means anything which is twisted or crumpled, and this of course carries us back to the nursery in which we first heard of that "cow with a crumpled horn". Alternatively, the word might make us think cheerfully of toasting crumpets on a winter's afternoon. The point is that in the midst of Meum's green paradise rose a considerable

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earthwork surrounded by a moat. Here, centuries before the birth of Jesus, a small tribe of ancient Britons had defended its women, its children, and its other livestock. Here, in fact, was the very Crump itself, after which the homestead had been named, a saucer-shaped mound with a rim of fragrant bushes, with its daffodils or its daisies, with its lofty sentinel elms and its pretty twittering of birds.

Time flowed steadily onward, and the sun-warmth of peaceful summers and then of summers made sorrowful by war added variety and intensity to the colours and the fragrances of that garden. They seemed also somehow to add more layers of serenity and kindliness upon that old homestead of thatch, and wattle and daub. Then, on a spring morning of 1944, Harry Jonas and I, fellow-guests at the Crump, realised that our hostess had been living there for ten years. By this time everybody was more or less tired and ashamed of a world at war and was ready to catch at any pretext for attempting a happiness; and so there and then the three of us resolved that on Midsummer Day, which would almost coincide with Meum's own birthday, some six or seven of her available friends must convene at the Crump and that somehow or other, despite all difficulties, there should be for once in a way cakes and ale without stint. A day or two later the invitations flew forth and almost immediately the enthusiastic acceptances flowed back.

II

Between April and June of that vivid year the affairs of the larger world dramatically changed. On June the sixth (D-Day) the much-vaunted Fortress of Europe was pluckily and triumphantly broached. We began to fear lest the more youthful of our nominees, including debonair and honey-tongued Denzil Batchelor who worked in the War Office, might not be able to join us. Very soon, moreover, our plan was grimly imperilled by a quite unexpected

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obstacle. On the night of June the thirteenth there were, we gathered, mysterious explosions near Ashford in Kent. On the night of the fifteenth I was on duty in Albany as a fire-watcher, spending one of those wearisome vigils in the Porters' Lodge which I shall soon describe: and quite suddenly the "siren" in Saville Row started to caterwaul, and within three or four minutes of its death-wail all the neighbouring guns began to bellow. Other fire-watchers had joined me, and presently we heard a travelling noise in the darkness above us, but it had not the wavering bass note which characterised the bombers from Germany. It was as though some cloudy titan were trundling a cannonball or a thunderbolt along an aerial alley that lay just above the famous little Ropewalk of Albany. It trundled along at an ominously low level, and whereas the bombers had rarely circled over London for more than forty or fifty minutes, they seemed that night to be in permanent occupation of the darkness above us. Half-hours, and whole hours, crept by, and yet our ground-gunners kept up almost without intermission their pandemonium of counter attack. Meanwhile, shell-scraps—decidedly ugly shards—continued to spatter right and left of the roofed-in Ropewalk, and every now and again we could hear formidable explosions to the East and the North. At about five in the morning, when the sky was thinning, we reassembled and, although the cannonade was still going on intermittently, we decided that we must let the battle continue without us.

In this way we became acquainted with those jet-propelled cylinders of dynamite, the flying bombs or doodlebugs: and how pleasing it would be to know for certain that Hitler, when he heard that American airmen had given his evil weapon this contemptuous name, did chew the carpet and scream that here was "another example of Jewish impertinence." . . . We had become fairly well hardened to being bombed in the orthodox manner and there was always a certain gaiety in our hearts

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when an attack was over and gone: but now, for days and nights and for weeks on end we had to listen with sad minds to the rumbling approach of the flying bomb, to the brief and deathly silence which meant that its mechanism had petered out and, five seconds afterwards, to the roar of murder and destruction. In those days we would go to bed as early as possible, knowing that in the small hours the siren would wail and that again we should hear the minatory crescendo of approaching dynamite. Perhaps some of us put an unconventional significance into the word "good-bye" when parting from a friend.

III

The outlook for M-Day was darkening. The trains running out of London were crammed to suffocation, partly because the least valuable persons value their lives most highly. Then too, Joan Lamburn and Mary Mitchell-Smith, being young, were slaves in Ernie Bevin's incalculable seraglio, and Ernie might need them now for special duties. Even Louis Marlow, Harry Jonas and I might be unable, if the newspapers were not exaggerating, to cleave our way through the massed multitudes at Liverpool Street station. I wondered at times whether all Meum's friendly preparations might be wasted for mere lack of guests. There was that chicken-mayonnaise which she had imagined, that ham which she had been keeping for the celebration, those bottles which she had so patiently collected. I recalled with anxiety my own promise to bring a bottle of gin and at least a half-bottle of French brandy as a contribution towards some immense and encouraging bowl of liquor—a Crump "cup".

However, the day of adventure duly came, and came in a glory of sunshine. Mary, as she will be known henceforth to our readers, arrived at Albany for a light lunch. "D'you really believe we shall get there?" she queried. Then she told me in her husky tones that the Ministry in

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which she worked ought properly to be called The Ministry of Waste. . . . "In any case," I interrupted, "it is wasting the time of a delightful—what *do* you call yourself?" You see, Mary makes and bakes little ornamental figures, lovers as often as not, somewhat in the Staffordshire tradition. "I suppose I'm a potter," she replied, "and, really, even after the smallest attempt in one of the arts, office work seems about as easy as it is wearisome." I remembered having had just the same experience during the other war, when, after serving my eight hours at Whitehall, I would go back to grapple seriously with a page of prose or a lyric; and so I reminded her of that anonymous artist who observed "No wonder businessmen are so successful, they have to deal only with businessmen," nor can there be any doubt that the spider who weaves a web out of her guts will be a good deal more tired at sunset than the ant who has been milking the greenflies on the roses.

We ate with our eyes on the clock: yet I remember how she told me that her colleagues in the Ministry seemed to have no interest in life except a little furtive sexuality, but here I again interrupted her, saying, with some severity, "You must not adversely comment upon the Little Man. He is now our national hero. After the first war we became Hollow Men, after this war we shall all be Little Men. Remember that, although we might have managed without Lord Woolton or General Montgomery or Mr. Churchill, England owes her very existence——"

"You don't mean a word of it," cried Mary, irreverently, "and, anyway, we must go. We've only left forty-five minutes for the queue." And so, grasping our light luggage, we left Albany, lost several taxis to American soldiers, and made our way apprehensively on the Number Nine omnibus. It seemed almost certain that the others must have already abandoned the enterprise but, thinking of a disappointed Meum alone on Midsummer Day, we stiffened our upper lips and talked bravely of anything other than Liverpool Street station. "Speaking of Little Men," I

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resumed, "Mr. Howard Spring——" but my sentence remains forever a fragment, for just at that moment the loud-wailer hysterically announced the dire visit of a doodle-bug. Nobody paid it any attention, and by the time that our 'bus was lurching through the City and round St. Paul's an All-Clear pealed out, but when at length we saw the human condition of the railway station its message sounded ironical.

Our train, the 2.20, was long enough to obsess the dreams of any small schoolboy, and yet it was already crammed so tight that the men and girls who were standing in the corridors looked like rows of human beings in aspic. We, and others in similar plight, lugged our baggage first to the train's head and then back to its distant tail, and this not once but half a dozen times. The people in aspic scorned and almost derided the baggage-carriers, crying out that there was not enough aspic to accomodate any new prawns. Nevertheless, two frantic railway-guards contrived to create thin places for some ten or twelve women with babies or for husbands with infants, but for those who had no infants handy it was clearly impossible to board that train.

"What can you suggest?" I said to one of the guards.

"Oh, try to get into the 3.45," he answered, still stuffing mothers and children past unwelcoming charwomen and mechanics.

Mary and I tottered away with our baggage, which included the brandy for lacing the Crump "cup", and we now joined another nightmare queue and waited for a train that would not even start for some ninety-five minutes. We felt hatred in our hearts for those puffed-up prawns in their aspic, seeing that Meum had arranged for a hired car to meet the 2.20, the Aspic Express. Now, as it seemed, M-Day had really been ruined by the flying bombs. There were moments when we debated the wisdom of returning to our homes but in the end, not without complacency in our stoicism, we literally stood our ground for an hour and a

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half, exchanging views on many subjects as, for example, whether it is pharisaical to admit that most people are both ugly and dull or pure humbug to say that everybody is interesting. Was it not insufferable of Leonardo, we said, to exclaim "Most human beings are merely sacks for food"?

Eventually, after shuffling onwards inch by inch, we crossed the ticket-barrier and were then so lucky as to secure seats in a war-dingy compartment. In this triumph we were accompanied by more than a complete outfit of fellow-travellers, most of whom were quite unspoiled by the airs and graces of the gentry. Indeed, one elderly charwoman, sitting hip to hip with Mary, began discoursing volubly on the disgraceful behaviour of the idle rich in occupying places that should have been reserved for their betters. And it was at me that she glowered. A middle-aged labouring man remarked, "Off it, Ma! Suck and suck alike, that's what I say": but the charwoman seemed to maintain that dynamite means nothing to a man who pays income tax. On the window by my elbow someone with strong passions had scratched the slogan "Kill Mosley".

Our groaning train at last drew up at Bishops Stortford, and it was at this very moment that the charwoman decided to lean over the carriage-window in order to see life. I said to her, "Madam, may I ask you to move away from the door as my friend and I want to get out?" And with that forthrightness which we all admire in the real workers, she responded, "Well, get out!"

As we made our way along the platform through a hurly-burly of bodies and a panzer division of bicycles and perambulators, we reflected sadly that we were still seven miles from our destination; and then with surprise and delight I perceived, some fifty bodies away from us, the dark-eyed friar-like face of Harry Jonas, and rejoiced that at least one more celebrant of M-Day had survived the ordeal by railway. Presently the tide of boots and bosoms perceptibly ebbed and there we stood, the three of us, won-

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dering how we could proceed any further. I introduced Jonas, the most attractive painter whom I have known, to Mary, explaining that she was a potter who specialised in representing enamoured simpletons; and just at that moment I almost barked my shoulder against the masterful chin of Tony Jordan. Now, he had his car waiting outside, a small car, a draughty car, one which might be described as venerable and toothless, but still a car with an engine of gold and a driver whose chin conceals an ever-helpful disposition. He had with him a friend and a pyramid of suitcases, but he immediately offered to adopt any two of us as passengers. We sent Mary onward as our envoy, obliterating her with our own impedimenta, and then Jonas and I set forth through the town, appreciating the broad skies of Essex and the warm gold of that midsummer afternoon. Jonas, I noticed, was wearing a crushed-raspberry-coloured shirt, a thick waistcoat, a coat, and an overcoat that suggested excursions in the Arctic. There can never have been a chillier mortal but it may be that, living as he does in a perpetual dream of pigments and Biblical prophecies, he cannot be bothered to eat. Indeed, it is rumoured that while he is intently painting, the mice eat up his rations. On this occasion, just as we were getting well away from the town, he suddenly remembered that he had not employed his sweet-ration and that in twenty-four hours it would be invalid, so we entered a small shop that displayed cigarettes, faded Christmas cards, balls of string and bottles of boiled sweets, and we came out of it with a bagful of brandyballs.

We were soon among hedges and fields, and Harry observed musingly, "To be really warm for once, to be away from those infernal doodlebugs, to see the English countryside at its richest and greenest, like this—why, what do I care if Tony Jordan doesn't come back here to pick us up till midnight? Except that I want to see Meum and the Crump. . . ." And he then told me that his old ramshackle studio in Maple Street, where Leigh Hunt had many a time

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entertained Thackeray and Dickens, was practically the one house in his district that had escaped the pulverisations of 1940 and the recent shatterings of the flying bombs. In 1940 he was in the Home Guard—indeed, he had only just obtained his release from that heart-stirring association—and on one of the nights when explosions were loudest and most numerous he had been required to report at Headquarters. It was then that he fully appreciated the magic of uniform. As he hurried along to an accompaniment of cannon-fire, of falling shell-scraps and of German heavy explosives crashing upon London, he discerned that a very old man was hurrying after him at a distance of eight yards. When a bomb came shrieking downward through the darkness, Jonas called out, "Lie down, old man!" and every time the old man obediently lay prone by a wall or in the gutter. Broken glass crunched at every step which they took; and so heavy was the smoke everywhere that at one moment the old man would be a clear form, at the next moment a faint phantom. This continued for a quarter of an hour. "It's queer," murmured Jonas, "that I should have represented safety to that poor old creature, and queer that our lives should have intersected for those tense few minutes. I never even saw his face."

We had now come to a cross-road which was pleasantly dominated by an old, whitish tavern. It had wooden benches in front for those who might wait thirstily for opening time and, at the back, there was a tangled little garden in which hens were pecking at insects. We sat on one of the benches, thinking of Tony Jordan and admiring a large field of silvering barley on the farther side of the road. Five country schoolgirls, the eldest not more than twelve years old, came wandering past, and they stopped by the hedges opposite our bench and began to pull down sprays of honeysuckle; and here they lingered, hardly speaking at all, possibly waiting for someone of adult years or possibly just dallying with the pleasantness of summer-time in the country. Anyway, the sight of children

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and the possession of a bag of brandyballs was too much for the kind monastical heart of my companion, and yet it was with difficulty that he managed in the end to overcome the shyness of those five little virgins. An endless pedigree of defensiveness must have inspired their absurd timidity, and I wondered if perhaps it is only the aristocratic girl, like Nausicaa in the Odyssey, who fears nothing from a picturesque and unknown male.

Even the longest of summer afternoons will not remain quite stationary, and I began to imagine how Tony Jordan's car, already suffering from asthma, had made its last heroic journey and had now expired in some lonesome ditch; but Jonas was saying in his dark-brown-velvet voice, "Don't worry, my friend, don't worry. You know that I can read omens. This is a day of such beauty that everything, I assure you, will go right. Everybody will turn up, and the brandy in your suitcase will prove to be the magic potion that will bring the Crump 'cup' to perfection. I know, for instance, that you fancy in your Buddhistic pessimism that this pub is closed, and to be sure it looks as though it had never been open, but I've a hunch that the door-handle will turn, and if I'm wrong you may call me a Laszlo. . . ." So saying he triumphantly turned the handle, beamed at me with his borage-blue eyes which were full of Catholic vindication, and having entered, immediately bewizarded the pleasant innkeeperess, and discovered a nutbrown ale that was, he assured me, the best which he had tasted for a long time. And in this verdict he was soon supported by so experienced a gullet as Tony Jordan's. "What did I tell you. . . . ?" cried Harry, indulging a little in spiritual pride, "here he is, and his car is even now all of a piece." "What's more," added Jordan, savouring the nutbrown, "everybody else in your party has arrived. At The Crump, I mean."

The sun was showering inexhaustible glory over all our microscopical patch of the sad human planet, and the Crimean oaks and elms which bordered our journey stirred hardly a leaf. The only vehicle which we encountered was

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the midget-car of the District Nurse and thus, having twice made the journey of several parasangs to The Crump, Tony Jordan tremulously re-examined the tyres of his gallant car.

IV

Nobody can appreciate the intensity of our delight in being back at The Crump unless he can imagine the constriction of life in England during the fifth year of the Nazi war. On all sides we were exhorted to enjoy ourselves less. We were told to Telegraph Less, to Telephone Less, to Eat More Potatoes, to see that our Journeys were Necessary and, if they were, to Travel Light; we were forbidden to go to the seaside, we were urged to perform the miracle of having a Holiday at Home, and now with the advent of the flying bomb, even the theatres had shut their doors. Arrived at the verge of the happiness which we had planned, we felt as though we were winners in some fantastic obstacle race.

Sun-warmed and welcoming looked the old homestead as it mused, no doubt, over the desperate days when Richard the Third had been a breathing menace. At the back of the house, there it was—Meum's oblong Dutch Garden with its well-weeded weather-tinted bricks, the dwarf-tree at each corner, and those finely-planned variations of colour and form that would have rejoiced even Gertrude Jekyll herself. Beyond, leading to the wild paddock, stood the arch of Albertine roses that exhaled so nectarine a perfume that to walk under that arch on your way to The Crump itself was to wonder whether the beauty seen with the eye or touched with the lips can ever be quite so voluptuous as the beauty indrawn by the nostrils! I knew well how those joyful cocker-spaniels would vote. . . .

As Harry Jonas, still wearing his arctic outfit, meandered with me through the knee-tall, winding avenue of lavender, I chanced to say that I was deeply dissatisfied with the work which I had just done, and Harry replied,

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"Ah! but don't you know why? When the moon is waxing, a man is creative; when she is waning, criticism sets in. Watch yourself and tell me if I am right. . . ." And then, walking under that aromatic arch and up the narrow, bricked path which led through a rustic wild-rose-covered gate to the inner garden, to The Crump itself, we saw the entire group of our happy fellow-guests and in their midst Meum herself, dignified and dainty as a seventeenth-century *Marquise*. Yes, there they were, after all—Joan Lamburn, quiet observer of more flamboyant personalities; Mary the potter, looking like the youngest disciple in Donatello's workshop; large, benevolent Louis Marlow, who might well have been the most absent-minded headmaster who ever gave the boys an extra half-holiday because it was Leap Year; and Denzil Batchelor, now in harness at the War Office, a poet, and a talker who, proud of his native language, is capable not only of constructing a sentence while he thinks but also of giving it an expressive close. Overhead, not quite incessantly, Spitfires, Lancasters, Halifaxes and other terrible toys purred, grumbled, roared, or thundered but we in that ancient and simple encampment were able for a little while almost to think of the war as a fragment of silent history.

I first found myself sitting next to Joan Lamburn, and she said to me, "Well, you've managed to get through to us, like spirits getting through at a séance. . . ." "With just about the same difficulty," I answered. Meanwhile, it seemed that, more introspectively than is usual, Denzil had been suggesting that the Germans were in serious peril by reason of their oil-shortage in a war that might be some day called the Petrol War: but the company remained silent and unenthusiastic. Everybody, we could see, was recalling the innumerable hopes and prophecies upon which he had been fed for the last four years. The beauty of the place, we suspected, had got the better of Batchelor's judgement: but time was to endorse his optimism. Meum now told us that even on M-day her spaniel-bitches must have their

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daily run in the fields, and perhaps a specially good run on that particular Day, and so, accompanied by Joan Lamburn, she walked across to the kennels and unlatched the wire door, letting loose a wild gusto of cockers. Just at the same time Mary and the Major went wandering away between the acres of the rye, and it was at this point that Jonas remarked upon the happy personality of the garden and upon the charm which Meum Stewart had somehow cast upon every corner of the old homestead itself. "Yes," answered Louis Marlow, "The Crump is a place which can make you feel homesick even although it is not your home": and that, I thought to myself, is about the most beautiful tribute to a hostess that I had ever heard spoken.

Presently I said to Louis, "I wonder what Jonas would think of England's newest poet, and perhaps her most unintelligible—Victor Clacton?"

"We painters are a brainless lot," murmured Harry, "and I'm afraid that I've never even heard of your Victor Clacton."

"That's not exactly a bombshell," remarked Marlow, "because Victor is entirely ectoplasmic. In fact, there is no such person. The last time that I was a guest here we invented a young and cryptic poet, a nephew to Meum, who should be serving immortally with the Eighth Army in Italy. So we wrote the first Clacton in the manner in which people write scandal in the game of 'Consequences': that is to say, line by line, passing the work along from hand to hand. His maiden poem was called, *Thoughts on a Gun-Site* and I should like to read it to you." Louis read the poem, thus puckering our companion's histrionic face into a hundred bewildered and appreciative lines; and at the end, Harry Jonas said, "Now I bet you that one of these really up-to-date magazines would accept that poem. It has an air of profundity although it means nothing at all. Why don't you send it to *The Boundary*?"

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"We did," replied Louis, "and not wholly without success. The editor rejected poor Victor's firstborn, but he sent to Meum, the poet's aunt, this charming letter of encouragement . . .

'Dear Madam,

Thank you for letting us read your nephew's poem, which is extremely promising for a young man of 18½. I'm afraid it's not quite up to our standard though, so I am returning it. But I hope we shall see more of this writer's work later on.

Yours truly,

Leonard Maloney
(Editor).'"

"Maloney's such a nice chap," mumbled Harry, who knows everybody, "but of course you must try again."

"We will," I said, "this very evening and here in this haunt of the ancient Britons. I know that Meum has invited some of her local friends to join us for supper, and why shouldn't the whole assembly produce Victor Clacton's more mature effort? All this reminds me," I continued, turning to Louis Marlow, "that you and I must be almost the feeblest writers in the Empire. Your new book, *The Devil in Crystal* is, I see, not even 'recommended' by the experts of *The Times Literary Supplement* who, much to my surprise, have found in this one week three or four better-written works of fiction. . . ."

"England," brooded Harry, closing his lapsis-lazuli eyes, "has always been a Nest of Singing Birds, but I had no idea that we were quite so rich in novelists. . . ."

"It is certainly remarkable," I admitted, "that Marlow's experience should also be mine. When *Time With a Gift of Tears* came out, last autumn, the *Supplement* again found in that one week several novels of greater merit. It does not affect Louis," I continued, "because of all the writers whom I have known, and they are many, he cares least about the reception of his work. He is not like me. When I was young, a hostile review would leave me smarting for months. Louis laughs at the whole tribe of reviewers. Perhaps he would say with Wilde, but more truthfully,

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'I have found the lover's crown of myrtle better than the poet's crown of bay.'

and yet—how pleasant it must be if you are the Most Popular Boy in the School. I can never make out why Somerset Maughan, who always holds the interest of a reader, should have been so consistently undervalued by the Other Boys."

"Young writers, especially the new poets," observed Louis, "seem to win their spurs with very little effort. Take——"

"Auden?" I prompted. "Spender, MacNiece, even Day Lewis?"

Marlow, however, had in mind a yet younger poet but one who possibly surpassed all the others in elliptical obscurity. "You," he said, turning to me, "would not admit that he is any sort of a poet. Well, no—perhaps not, but . . . I do think he is—what shall I say?—the foetus of a poet."

A chorus of bitches announced that their outing was over, and we could hear Meum crying in her melodious tones, "In you go, girls, in you go!" Soon afterwards, when they were back in the kennels, she returned with Joan Lamburn to the British encampment, and the whole group of us began, I recall, to debate the mystery of "luck". I remembered how a wise woman, whom I never met again, sat next to me at some dress rehearsal years and years ago and how she said to me, "A happy marriage is not an effect of luck, you know. It is a kind of wisdom." I could see, a little ruefully, what she meant. Of course, a whole lifetime of good luck befalls few persons . . . Raphael, perhaps, and the Abbé Liszt and Mr. H. G. Wells . . . and so most of us think of good luck as another word for a windfall. It was this that made me propose the question, "If your telephone rang for you, what news would you most like to hear?" I stipulated that the news must be of a personal kind since otherwise everybody would have answered, "That the war was over and the Allies victorious." Louis believed that he

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would most like to hear that one of his early novels was about to be lavishly filmed; Meum, that certain English flowers which have mysteriously lost their perfume had mysteriously regained it; Harry, that he was invited to spend five months in a warless Rome as the guest of some picture-loving Cardinal; Joan Lamburn, that her days were to be free thenceforth for drawing and writing; and I, that somebody had discovered a new play by Shakespeare and was asking me if I would consent to prepare it for the page and for the stage.

Our soap-bubble phantasies were pleasantly interrupted by the return of Denzil Batchelor and Mary, accompanied by a tray of drinks. Denzil, gazing at the elms, the lilac-bushes, the Methuselah of apple trees which reclined on its elbow at the centre of the old encampment, and exalted no doubt by the steady splendour of that long afternoon, cried out, with a twinkle in his eyes,

> "A garden *is* a lovesome thing,
> God wot!"

and he added, "But I don't think I much like the God-wottery of those late Victorians. . . ."

"Who wrote it?" asked Meum. And Denzil replied, "He also wrote,

> 'Oh, blackbird, what a boy you are!
> How you do go it!'"

"What a fool," said one of the company, and everybody laughed or smiled because the exclamation was so much in character.

We were still discussing God-wottery when our party was increased by the coming of a few friends whom Meum Stewart had found in her neighbourhood, and a minute or two later we heard Tony Jordan's chin cleaving a way through the tangled honeysuckle and saw, following in his wake, Tom Dickie, that tall, elegant day-dreamer who spent his childhood in County Tyrone. As one gay talker

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encountering another, he instinctively saluted Denzil Batchelor. "Yes," he remarked, spreading his endless legs half-way across The Crump (or so it seemed), "my name really is 'Dickie' and when I say so anywhere on the Continent you should hear the peals of happy laughter. 'Dickie,' they gurgle, tears running down their cheeks, 'M'sieur Dickie!'" Soon afterwards, while we sipped our gin and lime, he told us how an admirer had once sent him a large portion of venison, entrails and all, in a coalsack that was full of rents, and the stench of uncooked venison (he assured us) is a matter for raised eyebrows. "Anyway, Tony refused to have the sack in our cottage, and so, heaving it on to my old bicycle, which is not too strong at its best, I struggled along to Miss Margarine's boarding-house —*you* know her, Meum: old Miss Margarine at Saffron-Walden. Thick gouts of blood followed my track, and everybody whom I passed gave me a nasty shrewd look, as though they were memorising my appearance, and some even glanced at their wrist-watches so that their evidence might be exact when the dismembered body had been found. Of course old Miss Margarine was delighted, or so she was when I left her. But what do you think? The next day she rang me up and implored me to remove my generous gift because, if you please, the boarders one and all had refused to encourage blood-sports." When two "agreeable rattles" are together we witness a duel like that of batsman and bowler, nor was it long before Tom Dickie was bowled neck and crop by some conversational yorker adroitly pitched by Denzil Batchelor who, if I remember rightly, charmed his audience with a vivid account of travels in Spain during the civil war, first as a newspaper man with the Republicans and then, in the same role, with Franco's army. It was a long time since I, who move mostly among self-styled intellectuals, had heard anybody say a good word for Franco . . . or a bad word for his opponents. At this point, as I try to re-vision the picture of that varied day, I lose track of Mary and of Louis Marlow, and it seems

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probable therefore that she had beguiled him into the fields for a ramble and a talk about the secrets of pottery and glazes. It was certainly now that Jonas captured my attention by advancing the notion that the script of a nation always resembles its architecture. "Can't you perceive," he queried, "in the Greek alphabet a likeness to the columns and the pediment of a Greek temple? And German script, how much it resembles the old castles on the Rhine; and as for Arabic, why, it's full of domes and curves and minarets. . . ."

Now ever since boyhood I have played a game of pretending that the present is a piece of the past, of looking at the scene in front of me as though I were a traveller from the distant future who could magically call up a real but forgotten picture. This mental gymnastic produces the same emotional overtones or fragrances as those which we evoke when we project ourselves back into the veritably bygone. I can all but smell the stuffiness of an English Sunday in 1850; can almost sit down to a game of whist with Charles Lamb or John Keats (with the London rain flicking at the window); can almost give a cheer as Queen Elizabeth progresses magnificently through the little sun-baked town in which I am then alive; or, roaming much farther back into the pictures of time, I can easily sense the flavour of a typical hour in the life of a Periclean Athenian or a Middle-Kingdom Egyptian: and from all these day-dreams of vanished human life a faint sweet sadness arises, like a tender but melancholy perfume, presumably because life is so disappointing, joy so hard to come by, and because all our endeavourings have so absurd a resemblance to those of an antheap. It was in this familiar mood that I was now gazing upon that picture of men and women in a lovely and ancient garden at seven o'clock on Midsummer Day in the war-troubled year 1944. The approach of evening seemed to burnish the June gold, the sky's blue deepened, the gigantic soft clouds had caught a pale tinge of orange, all the fortunate flowers in that tenderly-nur-

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tured garden were obviously enjoying to the full their innocent existence, and it seemed possible with a sixth sense to feel the growing of the young fruit on Methuselah's wrinkled but inexhaustible boughs. The men and women in that old scene were like figures in some Conversation Piece which had for a short while become magically animated, and I knew very well that within a few decades our happy communion of mind and the very images that we were making would be as irrecoverable as the happenings of three or four hundred years ago, or three or four thousand. Those figures as they stood or sat with the glow of the sun behind them and greenness around and beneath, looked not unlike some dreamy picture by Watteau—not, indeed, unlike the Watteau in the picture-gallery at Glasgow.

Meum, who had much to contrive, was no longer in the garden and Harry Jonas, folding his huge overcoat more snugly about him, suggested that he and I should see if there was any way in which we could help her. We started with the intention of going straight to the old thatched house, but somehow or other we found ourselves wandering widely; as, for instance, through the paddock, the orchards, the ample kitchen garden with its regimented beans and marrows, and past the ducks who were still searching for the water which, only a few months earlier, had brimmed the moat; until at length we came out upon the long field of young barley where in happier times Meum and her guests had often spent a warm evening in shooting arrows at a garish target. When we returned to the garden itself, I remarked to Harry that flowers are really much more beautiful than the most beautiful of young men or women. Phryne herself could not hold a candle to a first-prize orchid, Antinous could not stand up to a flawless arum lily, and the comparison made me recall the pretty girl who had posed in the nude for Jonas and the delightful drawing which he had made. I heard that soft and secret chuckle which signifies that Harry, immune from mortal weakness,

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is remembering what fools those mortals be when they are entangled in the web of sexual instinct.

"Yes . . . Yes . . ." he mused, half-closing his eyes, "and there was another girl, damned pretty she was, who simply insisted on stripping there and then so that I might paint a portrait of her complete self. She was a married woman, but she'd got herself involved with a red-headed he-man who did something or other in Rhodesia. I made my little painting, and really I think you might have said it was not too bad. Anyway, the girl liked it, but the Rhodesian was in such a hurry that they left England without it. . . ."

"You've got it still? Have I seen it?"

"No. You see, a year afterwards there was a fierce knock on my poor old door, and in walked the lady's original husband. He opened with the words, 'I understand, sir, that you painted my wife in the nude!'"

"Then," I suggested, "out came the horsewhip!" Harry chuckled darkly and replied, "Oh, no! Not at all! The fellow next said, 'I'll give you whatever you like for that picture if you've got it.' Doesn't that show how unexpectedly these little human comedies turn out. . . . You remember Bobby Slender, the painter . . ."

"Of course I remember Bobby," said I. "He had a long-drawn affair with that yellow-haired actress . . ."

"Rosita," Harry said, reminiscently. "Yes . . . it was during the worst of the 1940 bombardment. My ramshackle studio was rather badly shaken about and so I put up for a few nights at a little hotel round the corner—the Garter, it's called; not a bad pub, considering what a picturesque slum I live in . . ." At this point he seemed to drift off into some long Catholic daydream and I had to haul him back with the question, "But what has all this to do with Bobby?"

"Have you ever heard two people actually making love . . . I mean in the most intimate sense of the phrase? It's embarrassing, I can assure you. Well, I went to bed one night, after the All Clear had sounded, and quite soon

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I could distinctly hear through the plywood partition the voice of a man making love to a woman, and making it exquisitely, lyrically, most movingly. And presently I heard also the responses of his bed-fellow. Imagine my feelings when I recognised Bobby Slender's wheedingly tenor notes and—I could have sworn to it—the faintly East End accents of yellow-haired Rosita. . . ."

"I am charmed to know," I said, "that Slender has so good a touch on the instrument."

"Yes," Harry continued, "no nymph need ask for a more poetical swain, but as the murmurs went on for a very long time I was unable to sleep or even to meditate. No meditation on the value of Purgatory stands up well to such a background of billing and cooing. And then, too, my conscience was troubling me. I'd heard more than I had any right to hear, and I felt that I was in honour bound to confess the truth to Bobby when next we met."

"What did he say to that?"

"He flatly denied that Rosita had been there at all, and that's how I should have left the matter if he had not introduced me to a charming girl who was with him, and said to me, 'Here's the real culprit. Let me present you, Harry, to my wife!'"

"But," said I, "you had recognised Rosita's voice. . . ?"

"Ah," replied Harry, "the new girl, the wife, was trying to imitate Rosita in order to charm dear old Bobby Slender. . . ."

VI

Meum, who was putting the last touches to a vast chicken-mayonnaise, called to us and, much to my surprise, asked me to send Louis Marlow to help her. Now Louis is even less handy, I always contend, than I am myself, and I could not imagine what chore she would ask him to undertake. As we walked back to The Crump, Mary appeared by one of the flower-borders and, depositing Louis on one

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of the garden-seats, must have annexed Harry Jonas for a stroll between the acres, for certainly I was alone when I gave the message to Louis Marlow. It was with some gratification that I noted his own astonishment at being summoned.

Having thus rejoined the Watteau figures, I could feel the absence of Denzil Batchelor. It is an absence which creates a vacuum. Then, just as the western horizon had begun to mellow, the kennels clamorously heralded Denzil's return, and as he flopped down among us he announced, "I shall go back to London with a cherry pie." A pretty damsel who was making pies in a cottage had eyed him, they had agreed in praise of the splendid day and, not satisfied with nods, becks and wreathed smiles, she had promised him a taste of her handiwork. Soon afterwards Mary and our painter rejoined us, Harry Jonas looking as though he had given her ghostly counsel, and so at eight o'clock by Willett Time nearly all of us were assembled in that green inner garden. Then Louis Marlow also came back to us, and explained that he had been sent for as Meum's Taster-in-Chief, that the Crump cup was completed, that it was both powerful and delicious, and that now it was Denzil who must lend a hand. In fact, the cup took the form of an immense bowl, and our hostess considered that it should be entrusted to the youngest man in the party. "She wants you," said Louis, "to carry it into the Dutch Garden, and we, too, have orders to convene there."

"The one thing left," observed Denzil, "that would make this day entirely unforgettable is for me to drop the bowl as I carry it from the kitchen. . . . How sad to watch those delicious ingredients flowing away into this ancient but teetotal soil."

The bricked and tidy tiers of the Dutch Garden provided us with delightful seats and it was a brave sight to see the cup piously brought forth and without disaster. A lordly cup it was, and a wonder in wartime, for Meum and

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Louis had subtly blended cider, Algerian wine, gin, brandy and a sprinkling of pineapple syrup, adding thereto neat squares of ice, fragments of mint and petals of blue borage. The food was worthy of the cup. The chicken-dish was of a size that might have assuaged the hunger of Polyphemus, and there was also a notable large ham, achieved in the local Pig Club, a tremendous birthday cake (it may well have been Titania's birthday) and a sumptuous trifle composed of sponge cake soaked in the pineapple syrup which we had purchased for much fine gold from Mr. Fortnum. As though all this were not enough to uplift our war-weary spirits, Meum presently produced, at the right moment, a bottle of Pim Number One, heroically safeguarded by her for the last few months. When it came to the giving of a toast, what else could it be but "Meum Stewart—and the Spirit of Poetry! Essex—and England!"

A few dark natures may grieve (but nobody will be astonished) to hear that by nine o'clock the beauty of the garden, the smouldering grandeur of the long day, the wine, the food, and the omnipresent charm of our hostess had a little gone to our heads, inspiring us to create in a communal manner the second and more mature of Victor Clacton's poems. By dint of passing the manuscript from hand to hand, we achieved a work of triumphant unintelligibility. Yet does it not convey a sense of power? What might not so young a poet ultimately produce? We called the poem *Nocturne* and here it is:

Uplifted with ages' fear,
Despondent with horror of tombstone and the cherubic dead,
I with orgasmic preen
(Under the intolerable-eternal)
Find the son of Cain.
Cave upon cave again
And the thunder profane,
Equilaterally perusing the thunder,
Thus and thus to cast asunder;
Rain! Rain! Rain!

The flowers droop and the forests fall,
While honeysuckle with brutal fingers grasps the entrails entirely,

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And the fat footsteps of Death crumple the crisp snow.
The new kings huff the Soviets,
Sharply screaming off the Donetz.
Glittering frozen fish
Of holy undertow, divined—beyond—
Out of the night's bright
Stars and out of the whirligigs of space;
Wheeling Ixion into place
With cruel and intricate obliteration
And the foxglove's divination.
Tell me, O greengage,
How prickly is the skin of a peach?

But who talks of love under the piston's clang?
The guns ache, the ache of wrath, the flak;
Night comes all the same
Snakily aphrodisiac in villa gardens at Sevenoaks.
When the night comes, when the night, O when the night
Lingers upon the forest of delight;
Her thighs, her thighs so black, her eyeballs Chinese white;
Victim's love
And the harlot's dentures gleam awry.
Let it go; let nothing return; let there be nothing;
Back to celestial zero. . . .

The stars were shyly showing themselves when our party began to dissolve, every person in it surprised that despite all difficulties we had achieved our whole intention, and wondering perhaps whether this might be a day that not one of us would forget, an oasis in the huge desert of wartime. Harry Jonas and Denzil Batchelor, like Friar Lawrence and Mercutio, strode away down the dimming lane to the village inn where they were to put up for the night and where, it is rumoured, Denzil—but the truth is that he could improvise a sonnet even to a woman M.P.

The rest of us lingered for some time, possibly for an hour or more, delighting in the fragrant darkness of the gathering June night and not wishing to put an end to so happy an interlude. But nothing endures, and at last we all wandered sleepwards, each thinking (I surmise) that there can be few souls as gay and gallant as that one which is now named Meum Stewart. What will be her next name, and where will she next be born?

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Chapter Three

THE STRAYED ANGEL[1]

> The body becomes lustrous and golden, but it has the lightness of the wind: for of water and earth no portion is left.
>
> Then he (the illuminated) beholds the things beyond the sea, he hears the language of paradise, he perceives what is passing in the mind of the ant!
>
> *The Dream of Ravan*

I

THE noblest man I have known was Allan Bennet, an obscure Buddhist monk: and next to him I think I should place George Russell—or AE, as everybody called him.

In John Eglinton's placid and sensible *Memoir* I find with some irritation the words, "A good many of Russell's friends, who have taken an interest in this record of his life, have counselled me to leave out Theosophy and Madame Blavatsky as much as possible. Why dwell on this aspect of a man whose greatest friends cared least about Karma and Reincarnation, and who delighted to meet all men on their own ground?" The answer is that Theosophy pervaded the whole of AE's mind and that to ignore "this aspect" would be like printing an edition of *Hamlet* and omitting the unfashionable soliloquies. Who, we may wonder, were these "greatest friends", these intellectual titans, who could regard AE's mysticism as an unfortunate foible or a slightly unpleasant disease? If they were really his greatest friends, he must have been an exceedingly lonely man.

[1] Dr. Ranjee Shahani presented me with the title of this chapter, saying that it was the description of AE which the Misses Yeats used.

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I shall dwell for some considerable time on the "aspect" of AE which his "greatest friends" regretted, and I shall do so because it was, I believe, the most important aspect and to me was certainly the most attractive. In 1905, as a very young man, I was living in Munich and trying to learn German. I had recently begun to suspect that materialism was a shallow philosophy, one which looked only at the surface of things, and in theosophy I felt that I had come upon a far deeper interpretation of existence. In this way I became acquainted with Indian religious books and began to experiment in that control of the senses and the mind which is the purpose of raja-yoga. Almost inevitably these interests led me to the verse and prose of AE, for he had obviously travelled along exactly the same path some twenty years earlier. Here in fact, as Eglinton admits, was "the poet of Theosophy"; here was a man to whom the external world was a horn-lantern that confined and half hid a spiritual flame; and here, too, a poet who wrote of man's Will as the force within us by which we may etherialise ourselves. The reader will be able to imagine the enthusiasm with which a young idealist read the lines:

> Out of the dusky chamber of the brain
> Flows the imperial Will through dream on dream:
> The fires of life around it tempt and gleam;
> The lights of earth behind it fade and wane ;

and sometimes there was in the work of this Irishman a new, strangely translucent quality as, for example, in the poem that begins:

> Its edges foamed with amethyst and rose,
> Withers once more the old blue flower of day:
> There where the ether like a diamond glows,
> Its petals fade away.

Not for another forty years did I learn, from John Eglinton's book, that the poet himself had been startled as his hand wrote down that second line, a line which must surely seem beautiful even to those who cannot believe that they

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looked up at the old blue flower of day during many forgotten lives.

I wonder how wild was the enthusiasm expressed in my letter to AE? It brought me an answer which made me more eager than ever to "touch lives" with this rare, clear personality. On July 4th, 1905, AE wrote to his unknown correspondent:

"It is a great pleasure to get a letter like yours. So many people care for one's work only because of the art in it that it is a real joy to find now and then someone who is more concerned about the life than the form. I have no interest in people who find in literature anything but an avenue to life. Every thought or mood is the opening or closing of a door to the divine world, and who is there we would not laugh at who went to a door and only admired and looked at it, forgetting its uses? Art for art's sake is considering the door as a decoration and not for its uses in the house of life. I agree with you about English poetry, for all its splendour—that it moves in a world of illusion because of its lack of fundamental ideas. I except Shelley, Wordsworth and Blake. Myself I prefer the Sufi poetry to any because of its intoxication with divine things; because romance and beauty and love, which in our literature move on a path of their own, are in Eastern mystical poetry wrapt into eternal things. I read hardly anything else for years when I was young but Eastern literature and I have never since been able really to enjoy the literature of Europe. I thought when I was young I would be able to bring into our literature in Ireland that interior life, but it needs a much bigger nature than mine and a better artist to do this. The book of my own which I like best is *Homeward Songs by the Way* which is published by John Lane."

An unforgettable and dreamlike journey round the world[1] delayed my meeting with AE, but in August 1906 I was in Dublin and at once went to see him. I must have arrived too soon, because I can see myself sitting in the twilight by

[1] See *Inland Far.*

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a window that looked on to the garden and talking to Violet Russell, AE's wife. She had a gentle voice and a gentle aura, but both of us were shy and our conversation limped. How relieved she must have felt when her husband appeared and took charge of his inexperienced guest. . . . I remember that almost the first words which he spoke to me were, "My wife is a better visionary than I am, only she does not ponder over what she sees."

AE was then thirty-nine but to me he seemed venerable, partly on account of his flowing beard, partly because in his "long grey pantheistic eyes", as George Moore so well described them, there were centuries of experience. He took me into a back room and showed me a number of his paintings, delicately coloured and almost shimmering representations of the "Devas"[1] or of the old Irish gods who, I felt, had been disinterred by the Gaelic League as a prop to Irish nationalism. We went into the garden-room and found that it was already thronged with somewhat shadowy ladies and with brilliant Irish talkers. AE, however, continued to give his attention to the newcomer and, having put me into a chair, squatted cross-legged on the floor and for the next half-hour delivered one of his famous monologues. It is astonishing to hear that at one time he was a tongue-tied loon, for there can seldom have been a more copious talker since Coleridge. On this occasion he said, I recall, that you could see a visionary form whether you had your eyes open or shut. You were seeing with a different sight.

Soon after this exciting encounter I met an early friend of AE, an engineer named Daniel Dunlop. They had lived —and others with them—in a tower on the coast of Ireland, all the little community studying *The Secret Doctrine* and practising meditation. And then one afternoon Dunlop told me about certain "very beautiful" essays by AE which had appeared long ago in *The Irish Theosophist,* and when I had read them, I suggested that Dunlop and I

[1] Indian Demigods.

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should set up as publishers and reprint the best of the essays. My colleague insisted that I should write a preface for the first of the booklets, and the reader may be amused by AE's dismayed protest against my extravagant hero-worship. He wrote:

"I like your preface all except the references to myself. My dear man, you must tone these down. You cannot compare me with Plotinus and Plato, and the last paragraph must go. Why cannot you say that *in my degree* I am trying to do in my time what greater mystics and greater writers did in their time? And if you must conclude with a peroration in praise why not say that in all I have published I have had only one aim. Tone it down like a dear fellow. I could not face the publication of essays of mine with so much praise, and yet I like your proem otherwise and think it ought to go in. You write very good prose indeed, beautifully balanced: let it stay there but wipe out the passages I have marked on the proof, which would make it impossible for me ever to give a copy of the essays to any one as it would be like handing them in praise of myself. Leave it to the critics. . . ."

AE had refused to claim any advance or any royalty on the booklet and in lieu of them I sent him fifty copies. In September 1909 he wrote:

"I have just come back from wilding it in Donegal for a month and I find what seems a whole edition of *The Hero in Man* and copies of a new and more expensive edition. The firm of Dunlop and Bax are certainly the most generous publishers and they have my blessing. Oh that Lane were like this or that the hard heart of Macmillan might be pierced through with contrition, for they only send me six copies. And Mosher in America imitates their low ways. A new era is dawning and the publisher of the Golden Age coming, will give all the edition to the author to dispose of as he will—at least, given Lane as the first step and Dunlop and Bax as the second step, that is the logical conclusion of the matter." Moreover, at this period I had

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started a small quarterly magazine called *Orpheus*. My somewhat fantastic purpose was to bring theosophy into the arts and art into theosophy, and in consequence I soon enlisted AE's help. At the end of the same letter he refers for the first time to "an Initiation Scene" which he promises to let me reproduce as soon as he can supply a photograph of it. Three or four months later he wrote:

"I am working at two pictures just now, an Aengus with Birds and an Initiation Scene. If I can get the drawing of the figures right in the last it might be the best. But it will take me some time. . . . I like the idea of your magazine and most of the contents and your own verses. I am inclined to think *Orpheus* would be better supported both inside and outside the T[*heosophical*] S[*ociety*] if it was not officially T.S. but you know best. I have begun to despair of any genuine love for mystical art or poetry or for any kind of spiritual imagination in the T.S. while it is in a mental state which I can only describe as the Devachan[1] of a secularist lecturer wherein all things heavenly are judged by reason and morality, and the flagging horses of emotion are whipped up to duty after every moral pronouncement. Oh, it is dreadful after old H.P.B.[2] But perhaps it is all right. There are as many ways of climbing to the stars as there are people to climb."

Six months later he is saying, "You think I am a faithless brute, a broken reed and a great many other bad things. I am. But I have been so lazy and tired that I could not get that picture finished. . . . I wanted to finish that Initiation Scene but never was able to spare the time to get models.... I am caught in the wheel and it turns round and round and I with it, and I will be jolly glad when the motion gets too swift and I am shot off into space. . . ."

In his next letter he says: "As for helping what you call hole and corner papers I have been writing and helping them all my life. I hate prosperous papers. I am editing a paper which is always pulling the devil by the tail on

[1] Heaven-world. [2] Madame Blavatsky.

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behalf of a movement which has every interest against it. I have always been on the side of the outcasts and hope I will always be. I was moved a couple of days ago to write some doggerel for a little revolutionary sheet in Ireland which appears irregularly when funds can be scraped to prepay a printer who will give no credit.

Here's a wreath upon their coffins since no one else is found
To say a kindly word for my poor brothers in the ground.
They had no Christian burial when dropt into the sod,
And they hinted at "No mercy" who sent them up to God.
They may have been low rascals but they showed before they died
That many-mullioned nation which has no soul inside.
The fire of the primeval man, a flash of the Promethean will
Before life's candle gutted down and Sidney Street was still.

I am always shocking my friends by my low tastes, and I am grateful for it relieves me of their intimacy and the trammels of their respectability. Besides, I feel I ought to help you in your fight to balance the moral effect of another person named Bax, Belfort Bax,[1] who writes the deadliest philosophy I ever came across. I am too busy to help you much but you have my soul with you if that is worth anything."

By the middle of March 1910 he cries out, "Bax, dear man, I know that Initiation Scene is shortening your life. I cannot get the legs right of a demigod, and I won't let it go forth to the world that the demigods have uncomely members." I never succeeded in catching that Initiation Scene, although I believe I have seen it, but Dunlop and I did bring out a second booklet—*The Renewal of Youth*—and of this venture he wrote:

"I have looked over some old essays and patched them together, leaving out certain references in them to affairs in the T.S. at the time. It is the best I can do. I have selected passages which had a kind of unity of cheerfulness. I am trying to bring tidings of good cheer. I think it would make a booklet about the same size as *The Hero in Man*. I hope if you think these good enough to print you will have pages

[1] My uncle, C.B.

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the same size so that people who like them can bind them together in one book. I am glad to think people like what I write. If the essays come out this way, nobody after I am dead will go back to the old I[*rish*] T[*heosophists*] and print them with all their errors and obscurities from the pages of that paper but will have them in the form I choose now. That is, if anybody will ever want to read what I have written when I have gone back to myself. You are a kindly angel and it is a pity you don't live in Ireland." We hear no more of the Initiation picture, but I had evidently asked him why the inhabitants of the visionary world should have more or less human forms. Why should they not be as different from us as trees or crystals are? His answer was: "You may give five different explanations of the form a vision takes and all may be correct for certain cases. I always regard the matter in this way. Everything in the earth tends to be human. We ourselves are among visible beings the nearest to the true divine human form, but one has only to compare the noble splendour of the visionary forms with those clothing the men and women we see, to understand that we are but imperfectly human and are ourselves only reaching out to a higher form. There is on our planet the archetypal form and that is the human. From the amoeba life begins to tend that way. We are halfway to it. The deva has achieved it and is trembling on the verge of no form. I do not know whether this throws much light on it but if I went into it any more I would never have done."

In a postscript to another letter of this period AE says, "I like your Chinese poems very much indeed. They are psychologically interesting—on the flat—like all art in very old civilisations"; and in the last of his letters from which I will quote there are references to three men who have since added much to their renown. "Lord Dunsany," wrote AE, "came into my room yesterday with Dermot O'Byrne's[1] verses in his hand and began shouting out a

[1] The literary pseudonym of Arnold Bax.

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poem for my edification. He was delighted with them. Perhaps you do not know Lord Dunsany's stories. I have a great admiration for them. I think you would like them —read *The Sword of Welleran*, which is his best book. But he has done better things since. He strides on the mastership[?] of the world of phantasy amazingly. There are large splashes of genius in him, I think. We have a new poet here, James Stephens, whose little book, "Insurrections" is, I think, the beginning of a big career, though I cannot say whether in verse or prose."

II

AE seems to have thought that his ideas (but not necessarily his own presentation of them) would arouse more interest at some future period when people shall have recognised the spiritual substance of the world, and this is indeed likely enough: but his prose has not the intensity of his finest verse and may not endure long. Much of *Song and its Fountains* is obscure and repetitive: *The Avatars* is to me wearisome, inhuman and overmellifluous; and there are chapters in *The Candle of Vision* which must have completely bewildered his reviewers. On the other hand, his verse at its best has a unique beauty, a kind of translucence which was new, and it may be that he will ultimately hold a position similar to that of Thomas Traherne. Critics in the future will undoubtedly notice two serious defects in AE's poetry; the first, that his lines have no rhythmic subtlety; the movement of the words does not add overtones to the sense in them; and second, that he frequently chose inappropriate or charmless metres. What could worse fit the meaning of the following verse than its jaunty measure?

> Who art thou, O glory,
> In flame from the deep,
> Where stars chant their story,
> Why trouble my sleep?

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I hardly had rested,
My dreams wither now,
Why comest thou crested
And gemmed on thy brow?

No rhythm, again, could be duller than the hymn-book metre of the following lines—and this trochaic metre was unfortunately a mould into which his mind seems naturally to have flowed:

We are desert leagues apart,
Time is misty ages now
Since the warmth of heart to heart
Chased the shadows from my brow.

Oh, I am so old, meseems
I am next of kin to Time,
The historian of her dreams
From the long forgotten prime. . . .

And yet notwithstanding these amateurish defects of AE's literary achievement, it may well be that he will shine forward into the future as a man who, in an age when religion was largely in ruins, never lost his awareness of the spiritual world, believed in the essential "majesty" of the Ancestral Soul in each person, and assured everybody who cared to hear him that it is possible by use of the Will to recover a greatness and brilliance of Being which we have lost by our own dereliction.

III

He was seldom in England, and I had soon to shun Ireland because, despite AE's enthusiasm for the climate, Ireland's atmosphere can certainly aggravate asthma. In consequence, I hardly saw him at all between 1912 and the summer of 1933. Once in 1916 I perceived him mooning along Charing Cross Road, and having run down the stairs of my omnibus I was just in time to steer him into Mr. Watkins's cave of mystery, that small dark shop in Cecil Court which contains many thousands of mystical or occult books. On the way he surprised me—I was still young then—by complaining that the people in London seemed to be

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without souls; a sentiment which is unflatteringly repeated in the "doggerel" which I have already quoted: and I remember wondering—for by this time I was becoming slightly more critical—whether he considered the soul to be an exclusively Irish possession. It was seldom that AE fell to the ordinary Irish level when thinking about England, and it was mere nationalism which provoked from him the ludicrous phrase, "I see the great tree of English literature arising out of roast beef and watered with much rum and beer." We English do not cat-scratch Ireland's literature.

When we were safely inside the gas-lit bookshop he became much happier and, taking down first this book and then that, recalled how much they had meant to him in his youth—presumably in those far-off days in the Tower. He directed my attention in particular to Leland's *Legends of the Algonquin Indians* and to a fine story called *The Invisible One*. "You will see there," he said, "a marvellous account of the Ancestral Soul." Then he sighed, and added, "I hardly dare think back to my youth, it held so much of beauty and excitement in the exploration of the inner worlds."

In 1933, after his wife's death, he almost settled in London, living at 41 Sussex Square; and Eglinton indicates that AE had been for some time out of touch with the young Irishmen who were trying to manage their unbiddable country. I now saw him quite frequently. When he first came to my rooms in Albany he talked as well and as variously as ever: but he had refused my invitation to dinner on the score that "a man cannot eat and talk at the same time", and so, thinking to give her a memorable experience, I asked Oriel Ross to perform as a preliminary the miracle of alternately eating and talking. She came pell-mell into the room, looking superb in a black dress, a leopard-skin mantle, red velvet gloves, and gold sandals on her long bare feet. "I was away," she panted, "in the country, but I rushed home because I couldn't endure their chatter about cows and the moon. Things I could see

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for myself." "Well, this evening," I answered, "you may hear, if you are lucky, talk about things which you cannot see for yourself, and neither can I."

As AE came into the living-room he explained his refusal to dine by saying, in the melodious voice that flowed round a listener as the summer tide flows round a stranded starfish, "It is a Dublin custom. I remember Yeats trying to invoke an archangel and nibbling plums while he did so, and of course the plums utterly ruined the invocation." It was clear that he had not realised the presence of Oriel Ross except as a shadowy female figure; and when Eric Gillett joined us, AE peered at him kindly and then forgot all about him. People were not real to AE. Never once did he show any interest in a man's background, in his hopes, in his trouble. We were shadows, shadows and listeners: and that is why I began this chapter by saying that Allan Bennett was the greater personality. Bennett was everything that a priest should be—and seldom is: an unshockable, wise, compassionate lover of all souls, grieving only that they persist in hurting themselves. People to Allan Bennett were sadly real.

On the next occasion of a visit from AE I invited Gabriel Toyne and Margaret Rawlings to come and hear him: and when I had seen AE down the Rope-walk (he took no interest whatever in Albany or in any of London's antiquities) I said to my companions, "An evening with the sage implies a mellifluous monologue, but just now and again he does listen—politely." "Pauses—politely," answered Gabriel, "and to him we are, I am sure, just Willing Ears." It was true. AE, once tongue-tied, relished the creation of a fine phrase (and who would not?), but I doubt whether he cared much about the identity of his listeners. Indeed, although the best way of getting Yeats to talk well was to ask him a question, AE was troubled and almost bewildered by the slightest interruption. There was an evening when he delighted me with the phrase, "A flower is the architect of its own beauty", and soon after-

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wards proceeded to expound one of his favourite thought-beliefs. "Just as the physical eye," he said, uttering billows of sound, "is a microcosm designed to mirror the macrocosm and can include in its tiny orb images of hills and the sea and the very stars in the firmament, so—I believe—does the soul of a great man, a Balzac or Shakespeare, unconsciously reflect impressions from innumerable human personalities, many of whom he may never have seen . . ."

"They will walk through his mind," I suggested, in my blunt English way.

"What's that, what's that?" exclaimed the sage, interrupted like a mountain stream by a small and unnecessary stone. "You may put it that way, if you wish; a figure like Hotspur comes into a play and speaks perhaps only two hundred lines, but he may have been some living Elizabethan personality who invaded Shakespeare's imagination, and then of course, once he had seen that figure, Shakespeare began to shape it with his art. My point is that the soul is here to reflect as much of humanity as it can, just as the eye reflects the universe." And when he had gone away I thought to myself, "Dear, kind, innocent AE, despite your belief that the soul is here to reflect humanity, how much have you reflected from *me*? You do not know if I am happy or desperate, married or free, capable of speech or tongue-tied. . . . I wonder, even, if your discourse would have been any different had it been delivered to Will Rothenstein or Dr. Dingwall?" I thought it was a pity that Irishmen should be such good talkers because they are always on the stage and therefore must not "dry up", and that Englishmen, being in the auditorium, are withheld by courtesy from interrupting.

There was also that evening when AE, having stuffed his pipe, never succeeded in well and truly lighting it, so fluent was his monologue: and when, in accordance with a London custom, I had offered him a drink, he replied, "No, my dear man, no, thank you, nothing, nothing, I have been drunken only once in my life and that was when I

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and a colleague had been bicycling or walking all day in the west of Ireland, and we had eaten nothing. Towards evening we came to an inn, and I put two spoonsful of that horrible stuff—whiskey—into my glass, and almost immediately heard my own voice rolling towards me from many miles away." Turning to my brother, whom I had convened for this discourse and who knew him better than I did, AE murmured reminiscently, "Arnold, when we spent that holiday together in Donegal, it was odd that you should so well have concealed your association with music.[1] I had no idea at all that you were a musician, and I listened with amazement when we had returned to Dublin and you began to speak about music with your friend Balfour Gardiner."

A little later I heard him expounding to me the nature of "the gawds" (gods) and then, turning to A. D. Peters, giving instantly a detailed, numerical account of the American steel trade. Eglinton detects a little vanity in AE concerning his poetry. Dr. Ranjee Shahani has convinced me, not with any difficulty, that this vanity did not exist. Dr. Shahani says that, as we know, Sturge Moore took it upon himself to rewrite the poems of other poets: and Shahani wrote in an article somewhere that Sturge Moore had considerably improved one of AE's poems. Moore, a literary man without religion, was alarmed by this news, but AE, as we should expect, observed, "If it is a better poem what harm has he done?" AE's one small vanity came rather from his extreme versatility. He liked to show off a little by discoursing about the gods, turning to a second person and describing the condition of Irish agriculture, then to a third listener and praising the excellencies of Balzac. When the evening was fully aglow with his kindly and brilliant personality I proposed that he should recite one or two of his poems. "Which?" he enquired, "I can say any verses that I have written." I answered, "There's

[1] Gabriel Toyne, when I repeated this sentence, commented, "Perhaps your brother did not get a chance to say that he had some interest in music?"

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one which refers to the tramcars of Dublin city as

The glittering galleons of the street;

can you speak that one?" The poet immediately intoned it and proceeded, with the lightest encouragement, to the incantation of seven or eight more. His delivery was hypnotic, and his audience that night, being unfamiliar with a genuine poet's heavy stress on rhythm, may have been almost literally entranced.

After he had left us, dreaming his way along Piccadilly, Arnold said, "I heard dear old AE recite that poem about the trams one afternoon in Dublin, but the clatter made by the glittering galleons prevented me from catching more than a word or two here and there. The sight of me," he added, "always elicits that remark about not realising that I was a musician."

It was in October that I next listened to AE. Nancy Price had asked me to attend a rehearsal and that means that we lunched late, and so it was that about three in the afternoon I was walking home when I observed AE strolling inappropriately across the so-called garden at the centre of Leicester Square. He seemed to recognise me, or it may have been that he was thankful for the sight of a Willing Ear; and if he had not identified me, he acted the more benevolently in taking me to Macmillan's palazzo and there asking for two of his books. We waited in what may have been a packing-room, and presently an assistant brought the two books. AE then took from his pocket a small box of child's chalks and on the title-page of *Song and its Fountains* rapidly limned a tiny mystical picture—a brooding figure on a hillside with the setting sun behind him.

This done, we went back to the Leicester Square garden and sat among the tramps while he held forth upon the early, exciting years of the Theosophical Society, upon Pantanjali's yoga-system, and upon his belief that the soul brings to every man the persons whom he needs.

He also told me of a son in Chicago who wished him to

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live there, " because I am growing old and they think they should look after me, but I don't feel as old as all that. Still," said AE, " if I am to go at all, I must go soon. It wouldn't be fair to dump my old age upon them without first having tried to give them something worth having." The thought of age caused him to speak of rheumatism. " I do have it now," he admitted, " and my first attack came after I had been sitting a long while on some cliffs in Donegal—with Arnold, I think—and watching the sky and some of the flame-like people. The experience was well worth the rheumatism: and speaking of the gout which afflicts you and the rheumatism which afflicts me, an old lady in Ireland told me once that she remembered how her grandfather and the whole family had sat down to dinner with a turkey in front of each person: and presently the grandfather turned to one of the younger men and said, 'My boy, have another bird.' "

At length we got up and walked towards Piccadilly. It was a quarter to four and AE said benevolently, " Well, I'd better allow you to get your lunch. I have had mine ": and, assuring me that he would take a bus at Piccadilly Circus, he wandered broodingly in the direction of Fleet Street.

The months flowed away imperceptibly, as they do for a Londoner, and it was March 1934 when I thought " I really must ask AE to come here again. I am wasting him. And this time I will suggest that we spend the evening alone. Then at last I may be able to discover what he really believes of reincarnation, of the post-mortem states, of 'the gawds', and of the difficult Anatta doctrine."

He answered that this time he would prefer to talk to me alone, and arriving at nine o'clock he stayed for two hours. For about fifteen minutes he spoke about his conviction that Shakespeare's imagination was " thronged with living souls ", and vainly did I struggle to deflect him by asking what he thought about the dazzling idea, well presented in *The Road to Immortality*, that each of us is a fragment of a cell pertaining to a Group-soul with which

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we have an affinity. "What's that?" he said sharply and continued with his exposition of Shakespeare's inspiration. At one moment he came back to the phrase "A flower is the architect of its own beauty", and when he had told me again of his holiday in Donegal with my brother I contrived to say, "AE, you are a Vedantist——" "What's that?" he cried, and before I could tell him how the astonishing Anatta doctrine had modified my earlier conception of the soul, he was eloquently outlining the philosophy of the Vedanta. Finally, with a steady up-stream effort, I succeeded in asking whether he could definitely recall one or more of his past lives, and my persistence was well rewarded.

"My clearest memory," he answered, "dates to the ninth century in Spain when, as a member of some Order of Knights, I wore a red cross on my surcoat and passed through a large gate together with many companions. We were going out to fight against a hostile army and that, no doubt, is how I met my end. . . . But I also remember Chaldaea, Egypt, and two previous lives in Ireland. In Egypt I was laid upon a stone slab and commanded to 'listen to the music in the heart'. A golden glowing circle surrounded me and became larger and revealed majestical presences within its glory, and then diminished and faded out."

Only a few months later AE "went back to himself". Eglinton quotes from a letter the words, "The doctor says that he thinks it is not cancer but I really do not care": and a friend told me that almost to the end he discoursed to his doctor about karma, reincarnation, Patanjali and the Oversoul.

IV

It is difficult to think temperately about AE's "greatest friends", they who took no interest in all that meant most to him and who appear to have felt that his spiritual certainties were childish delusions. For what reason, we ask ourselves, did they like or respect him? As a political parti-

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san he must have been lacking in violence; as a talker about literature or painting his judgements were not subtle or even learned; as an economist he was, no doubt, stimulating to other economists; but as a friend he had no spontaneous concern with another man's life, and with him to be out of sight was unquestionably to be out of mind. If these friends of whom Eglinton writes were, as I suspect, literary men, it is odd that none of them, except perhaps James Stephens, should have paused to ask himself whether, in view of AE's undeniable brilliance of intellect, he might be a great deal profounder than they themselves, whether they could possibly be justified in superciliously dismissing karma, reincarnation, and the other guiding ideas of AE's life as exploded nonsense, whether—in fact—they might merely be drifting with the intellectual fashion as most literary persons do, and whether in the end it might not be they who should prove to have had infantile notions of the universe and ridiculous ideas about man. How, I wonder, did the poet think about them? Perhaps he felt that literary men are seldom anything but clever and conceited children, spiritual minors who never come of age but continue from boyhood into senility in fighting about one another's toys. It is now forty years since I found with astonishment that I had been born into a narrowly rationalistic period and that the literary world of London, doped by the materialistic philosophy of the 'eighties, would have treated Plato as an amiable crank and Plotinus as a border-line case. I had greenly assumed that when I met writers I should meet thinkers, and that thinkers were men greatly concerned to understand the universe and to explore with open minds the difficult country of the soul, of mysticism, even of psychic research. I found nowhere a mind that had any innate sense of that spiritual world which, in my view, underlies and also projects the obvious world: I found nowhere any writer who would even debate these old and crucial enigmas in a spirit of genuine enquiry.

A fashionable agnosticism and a bias to the left seemed

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to provide all that anybody wanted from the writers of the period. That is why it is hard to see how AE ever achieved any literary renown at all. He had to swim against a period which had a very strong current, and it is not as though his merits of the workshop, his technique, his craft were of so fine a quality as to charm a generation which had no use for his view of man and the universe. It is true that his name rose to the surface when "the Celtic Movement" was the liveliest force in the literary world; but even throughout the acid phase of Lytton Strachey, the flippant phase of Noel Coward, and the smart-child phase of Evelyn Waugh, AE did not decline in prestige or lose a strange public of which I have never found a specimen. Now that most of the world has endured the coarsening of another vast war in which nearly everybody has had to harden his imagination and to externalise his attention, it seems unlikely that AE will be much considered during the next forty years. He would not sorrow for this, and in any case he has now gone far into those other and freer worlds which were always more congenial to him than our world of three dimensions.

If AE was right, if there is a spiritual order which is far more vibrant than the state in which we are now existing, if the old mystics were not semi-imbeciles but truly illuminated minds, if science itself should ultimately demonstrate the existence and survival of the psyche, then serious thinkers will find that in Ireland there was once a mystical forerunner of what the future will have discovered, and the best lyrics of that lonely earth-visitant will be valued not only for their verbal beauty but for the moods which their maker was trying to communicate. Meanwhile, let us recognise that we are approaching a "tough" period and that its literature will also be tough, and that we shall be told that mysticism is of no worth to men who are knee deep in mud. And that is the shallow equivalent of telling us that the stars no longer exist because the sky is opaque with cloud.

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Chapter Four

DESIGN FOR DYING

I

Abandoning his body by the gate of dreams, the Spirit beholds on awaking his senses asleep. Then he takes his own light and returns to his home, this Spirit of golden radiance, the wandering swan everlasting. Leaving his nest below in charge of the breath of life, the immortal Spirit soars afar from his nest. He moves in all regions wherever he loves, this Spirit of golden radiance, the wandering swan everlasting—*Brhadasanyaka Upanishad*

THE practice that was so curiously called "fire-watching", as though our duty had been to fiddle while London burned, was wearisome at any place, I am sure, except when it became deafening and dangerous. In Albany, that serene island in the turbulent sea of Piccadilly and Burlington Gardens, we carved the long night into three portions, and the poorest fun befell the Second Watchman, who had often to roll out of bed at twelve on a freezing night and to sit up alone in the Porters' Lodge until four or five in the morning. Even so, it was better to be bored than bombed. When the bombing began, strange dream-like figures would come pattering down the Rope Walk to the aid of the lone Watchman. I do not think that we could have helped one another to much purpose, although it was always a comfort to see Dr. Murray arrive, because he was presumed to carry some precious anodyne in his little bag.

The heavy explosive which dilapidated so broad a chunk of King Street, St. James's, produced a wide, livid, prim-rose-coloured flash; and the dynamite that smashed the clock and blew out the windows of St. James's Palace, landed on Pall Mall with a roar so terrific that the human

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body seemed an obsolete organism, left over from a playful epoch of bows and arrows. We know now that these experiences were not actually "more than flesh and blood could stand", but more, perhaps, than they were designed to withstand. Possibly, in the course of this written meditation, we may find the cause of so extraordinary an attack of man upon man.

The air-raids from Germany at least introduced to one another the somewhat ingrowing personalities of Albany; and there were noisy nights when the scene in our spectrally-lighted entrance-hall suggested that all of us had been abruptly killed and that we were moving within some bizarre fantasy in the "astral world". There in one corner, among stirrup-pumps, hoses, ladders and grim hatchets, Edith Evans and Cathleen Nesbitt might be discussing his very newest play with J. B. Priestley. Elsewhere, sipping the tea of Mrs. Whittington, Robert Helpman, Terence Rattigan and Rodney Ackland appeared to be comparing the merits of Ivor Brown and James Agate. In fact, as a resident pleasantly observed, "It's like a cocktail party on luxury cruiser—without the cocktails."

II

When the Luftwaffe came to murder us, everybody had of course, to prepare for instant death. Many of my nocturnal companions had probably decided long since that there is no God in the universe and no spirit or soul in a man. Others, I expect, tried to make up their minds on these tremendous questions. As for me, I recall with special clearness a quiet but icy vigil when Dr. Murray, to whom I have already referred, did not arrive as he should have done, so that I might go back to bed: but, picturing him snugly cocooned in winter blankets, I had not the heart to hammer on the door of a man so kindly and so virtuous. Why, he might possibly be plunged in a wonder-dream which was providing him with a satisfactory interpretation

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of the universe: and indeed, what does he think, I wondered, of this universe, of being alive, of death, of his own entity? Then, resuming my chair in the Porters' Lodge, I thought I might just as well set down my own conclusions, after a good many years in the world, concerning these ancient and fascinating enigmas.

III

A few centuries ago we should have been living and thinking in an ambience of religious orthodoxy. Scientific opinion is the orthodoxy of our own time, and if a man is not a scientist he should expect few people to take him seriously; but science does not awe me or impress me as it awes and impresses most of my contemporaries, and the reason of this is quite simple—that science cannot answer any of the questions which are to me of most interest. Like everybody else, I listen with respect to a man who tells us how life, in his judgement, appeared in the world, or how the universe is fundamentally an electrical construction, but what I really want to know is why there should be any universe at all and how it is that you and I, with our tiny complicated brains, should be considering it so curiously. How extraordinary it is that there should be such a phenomenon as Light. . . . It might not have existed: and it is, I suppose, the most remarkable of all inventions: yet once I said to a couple of young scientists, "We do not know what Light is", and they proceeded, politely, to give me a textbook definition. It obviously satisfied them. They were perhaps incapable of realising the wonder of Light. They had grown used to it, just as most people soon become used to being alive, to seeing a moon or a sun, and take everything for granted although we should think more effectively if we took nothing whatsoever for granted.

This makes me recall an evening when a chairman asked me to speak to an assembly of business men who had just had dinner. I knew that I was no witty and entertaining

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speaker and so I decided to risk their displeasure and to ask them a serious question. It was this: when you are asleep and dreaming, which is the more real to you, the Stock Exchange or the contents of your dream? There was at first a little merriment, seeing that after-dinner speakers are expected to be amusing; but very quickly those men perceived the significance of the question, and they did not seem surprised by the consequent suggestion that people who take life for granted may in reality be fast asleep. Moreover some men, as all of us know, are such heavy sleepers that only an alarm-clock could awaken them. They are taking their dream so unquestioningly that, seeing the vastness of the universe and the microscopical smallness of any human organism, they conclude that "the soul" was a ridiculous and flattering fancy born of our prescientific infancy. Some of them go so far as to chide "the East" for concerning itself so much with the things of the spirit, with "the next world"; but the West, in its concentration upon this workaday world has not been more usefully occupied while it perfected these atomic bombs. The East might not unreasonably reproach the West. Moreover, which is really the more astonishing, that huge pageant of the stars, or the human eye which can see it and the human mind which for so many thousand generations has been trying to understand it? The soul and the universe may well be as David and Goliath.

IV

Very few persons look like immortal spirits: and how inglorious is the log of our voyaging planet, an immense record of cruelty, craftiness, oppression, pettiness of mind, and ignobleness of pleasure. No one should be astonished when a friend admits that he cannot believe in the immortal existence of such creatures as men and women. Why, whenever life ceases to flutter within the body of some loved person, we feel that the unreality of the soul is as

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self-evident as the fact (if it were a fact) that the sun moves round the earth. What, again, are we to think when we watch the symptoms of paralysis or of senile decay, or when we perceive with dismay how cancer may sometimes transform a noble personality into one that it unjust, bitter, even vindictive? This—we feel—could hardly befall an immortal spirit, for are we not witnessing a triumph of "matter" over "mind"?

Or suppose that we recall how the classical Athenians, whose brilliance of intellect we have not yet surpassed, had a word, "pneuma", which meant both "spirit" and "air" (or "breath"). And if the Greeks, with the powerful exception of Plato himself, thought that spirit and life (or breath) were one and the same thing, well, surely . . .?

But that is where I disagree. A man may search long for his spectacles if they are already perched on his nose; and Man as a species may wander astray for two or three thousand years if he has made a mistake at the outset. His mistake was to confuse Life and the Soul. It was a perfectly natural mistake in an animistic world, but it has led humanity to the brink of a fatal quicksand. If everybody was certain that everybody else is potentially an ever-enduring spirit, should we invent new bombs, or torture the bodies in which those spirits are caged, or even think it worth while to swindle one another in business deals? What, then, if humanity is indeed hunting for its spectacles? What if "Life" and "the Soul", far from being identical, have been from the very beginning of their strange association, bitter antagonists?

It is an idea worth looking at.

What is the outstanding characteristic of "life" or "the life-force"? Extreme and violent egoism, a desperate determination to persist as long as possible and, through the amazing mechanism of sex, to transmit itself to other forms. The life-force in each form is utterly ruthless and concerned solely with itself. Even in the vegetable world every tree, every shrub, every flower, strives to obtain the

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maximum of nourishment, being probably quite unaware of its many competitors. When we examine the insect and animal world we perceive at once that each form of life is doomed by natural law to feed upon some other form if it is to survive. It is "life" that urges the weasel to bite the neck of a rabbit, the fox to snap off the head of a chicken, the small killer-whale to eat out the tongue of the great sperm-whale, and so to leave it starving though still alive. Here each life-form is obviously well aware of its rivals, but we cannot justly exclaim that the life-force in animals is cruel. It is merely pitiless.

Cruelty is added when life combines with human intelligence. It is an exaggerated manifestation of life's will to dominate. We see it in the character of certain early races, such as the Assyrians, the Carthaginians and the Aztecs, just as we still see it in the insensibility and absence of fellow-feeling which are typical of the schoolboy in his early teens. If we consider life's record we have to admit that it makes a pageant so hideous that we can hardly understand how priests and poets could ever have attributed "Nature red in tooth and claw" to a benevolent Creator. On the contrary, the mere arrangement whereby each form of life can only survive by devouring some other form of life suggests that Nature was set in motion rather by a fiendish than by a divine power. Far from being an admirable force, life ought to be regarded by us exactly as the mediaeval millions regarded the Devil. It is responsible for all the acts of aggression which disgrace our history. It is responsible for panic in a burning theatre, in a sinking ship. Life, in fact, is responsible for making this earth so unhappy a planet. There is no bickering in the quiet mineral world. . . .

Now we surely have to agree that self-preservation is the basic impulse of this life-force. The last thing it would dream of doing is to frustrate its own passionate purpose. This being so, it is difficult to account for the love which causes a man "to lay down his life for his friend". If they

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were nothing but vitalised organisms it is extremely difficult to account for Saint Francis, Father Damien, the Buddha and thousands of his followers who, like himself, recognised that everybody else and every smallest insect was no less real, no less liable to suffering, than they were. Why did Jesus say that "greater love hath no man than this, that he is willing to lay down his life for his friend"? It looks as though Jesus knew, as we should expect, that the Soul can overcome the instinct of Life.

Is it possible that we see the Soul in action whenever we witness a self-sacrificing, disinterested deed? Or must we attribute such behaviour to a development of the maternal instinct, present in so many creatures, for protecting their young? Men, certainly, can inherit some part of that instinct, and everybody knows how valiantly it shows in various animals, but also how short a while it usually persists. After a few weeks a bitch is bored by her litter.

V

Nobody would consider seriously the view of things which I have in mind unless he were to admit the possibility that the Soul is and must be something quite separate from Life. Blood, said Goethe, is a highly peculiar medium (ein ganz besonderes saft), and Life is a force mysterious in the extreme. What if it is a link between matter and spirit? What if it is the only medium through which the Soul can percolate into matter? We shall be sadly astray if we persist in the antique error of assuming that the Soul is present at the moment when Life inspires the body; and we shall be equally astray if we assume that the Soul can exist only in a human organism. What if puberty is, for human beings, the birth-crisis of the Soul when, if ever, it is to find a mortal habitation? A person's experience is basically coloured and limited by the sex into which he or she is born. The great upheaval which we call puberty may be not only Life's fanfare announcing that another organism is ready

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to transmit the precious ichor of life: it may be also the second birth of a boy or a girl, the uncomfortable birth of the soul, and all too often a still-birth. The various mental and emotional patterns which unfold during puberty resemble a specially strong wave-length upon which the Soul, hitherto concealed, can manifest its presence. This would account for the idealism, the aesthetic awakening, the religious phase, that so often accompanies puberty. Now or never, the real person, the spiritual glimmer, may be born, and the fact that the world is crawling with organisms in which the soul was still-born or has long since died is nothing against our picture of what happens. Indeed, this interpretation of the human enigma is powerfully supported by the notorious disapproval of sexual impulses by almost every religion. What is the cause of that bitterness against "sex"? Religion is a manifestation of the soul, a recognition that we are more than intelligent bodies and that there is "another world" or dimension. Its devotees recognise that sex-instinct is life's most attractive lure and therefore an extremely formidable opponent. Sex, in a word, might easily obliterate the first, weak, tentative emergings of the soul: and in millions of men and women, so it does. In this view, sex, like a strong river, carries the raft of the soul into this life-world and, having done so, may capsize it; and it was perhaps for this reason that men and women in whom the soul was beginning to awaken fled for safety from sex into the desert or decided that ascetism in monastery or convent was the way to wisdom. "Sex" may be at once a trick of the life-force and a chance for the soul to enter the physical universe.

VI

Our pleasure in anything which we call beautiful is of great significance at this point, because in our beauty-delight both life and the soul may be at work. No wonder, then, if dire confusion has ensued!

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Nobody has been able to define beauty—of course not—but we do know that it is a quality in some things which arouses happiness within us, and perhaps we may add that there is a kind of beauty delightful to each of the senses. Everybody will agree that the word can be used of certain forms, colours and movements. Most thinkers would agree that there is also a beauty of sound, of texture, and even of scent. Some also maintain that there is beauty in a mathematical demonstration or the solution of an elegant chess problem. Furthermore, there is a beauty which only the mind perceives, that charm of a well-devised, well-proportioned poem or novel or play. For us at this moment the most important characteristic of beauty is that, so far as we can judge, human beings alone are able to perceive it. Dogs are indifferent to the grace of flowers; horses and cows care nothing for the most spectacular or most delicate of sunsets. How astonishing, then, that Santayana should roundly assert that our joy in beauty has always a sexual origin! On the contrary, beauty has no attraction whatsoever for the sex-instinct in itself. Does a bull prefer the most shapely cow, or the lion care for the show-ring "points" of a lioness? If a male animal makes any choice at all among the females of his kind he probably chooses by smell. Again, what possible sexual association can be delighting us when we contemplate an aurora borealis or a fluttering moonpath on a quiet sea? The truth may well be that we perceive beauty with a part of ourselves which, unlike the life-force, *does not desire anything for itself.* Schopenhauer was much nearer the mark than Santayana when he pointed out that aesthetic delight brings with it a rest and release from personal desiring. Nevertheless, while we are alive our own life-force and this other part of us which used to be called the soul are interwoven, and as a result of that interweaving the soul has required more and more beauty in its sexual companion, although life by itself is satisfied with mere procreation.

Moreover, just as no thinking man will maintain that

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in "spiritualism", continue to waste their time (as one would suppose) by still further investigating phenomena which they have long since denied. They should find out why they do so.

What, then, is the commonest objection to the evidence offered by psychic research and spiritualism? It is that "the spirits talk either rubbish or trivialities", a criticism which seems to be based on the odd notion that if we survive death we must immediately become omniscient or at least much wiser. Is the level of our own talk invariably impressive? As we go along the streets or sup with our friends, do we hear much that is neither trivial nor absurd? Moreover, it is not by philosophical pronouncements, but by mentioning small and intimate details, that a spirit could most surely prove his identity. I should not care to have to prove my own identity on a faulty telephone to a determined sceptic. If a "spirit" refers to small intimate happenings, he is said to be trivial; if he utters a lofty discourse, the sceptic declares that it could all have come from the medium's mind.

And then, too, how amusing it is that our sceptics, confronted by imposing phenomena, take refuge (as they suppose) in the word "telepathy". Their grandfathers, the mid-Victorian materialists, would have scorned that word. Now, if thoughts, emotions and images can be transmitted from mind to mind during life and without any physical apparatus, it seems likely enough that the mind can exist without a brain and body. The separateness of our bodies has deluded us for thousands of years into the naïve assumption that our minds also are separate. If we perceive that emotions and ideas from other persons are impinging upon us all day and every day, we understand in some degree the mechanism of fashion and of panic. Few of us invent our own thoughts or can get outside the philosophical atmosphere of our period. We are overwhelmed by the majority of minds.

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IX

How many thinkers to-day would admit the possibility that the Soul does exist and was not a fairy-tale princess? Few. How many would go forward to the conception that the Soul is a love-force which, hitting our world from another "dimension", has, with extreme difficulty, made some slight impression upon the crude and pitiless world of the life-force? Fewer still would accede to *this* idea. And even fewer still—a remnant which finds itself exiled in the twentieth century—will apprehend at once the conception of "Group-Souls". What does that mean? Why, that as thousands of cells, differing in function and in importance, make up a physical organism, so is each person or soul a cell in some mightier entity which may have forty million representatives. If we think round among our friends we may quickly discern how one of them belongs to the Group-Soul of which Napoleon was an exceptional fragment, how another is a leaf upon the tree which once bore Nell Gwyn, how a third will ultimately be re-absorbed into that being of which Isaac Newton was a particularly active cell, and so on and so on. And the fact that this idea seems to imply the hierarchical principle is perhaps a recommendation, because our solar system itself parades that principle and because there is surely a strong tendency in Nature to repeat her patterns.

Now if we intuitively recognise this Group Soul idea, we shall not have quite the ordinary difficulty of the Western mind in admitting the likelihood that reincarnation is a psychic law which is no more incredible than the physical law of gravity; but in order that reincarnation may appear less fanciful than it seems to many persons, let us also consider the modern conception of Time.

The commonest objection to the principle of reincarnation is that nobody really remembers a past life. I do not believe that this statement is true, but in any case there is no reason for supposing that we *should* remember such

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remote experiences. We remember our present life in a most fragmentary fashion. Out of my own infancy and childhood (say, up to the age of eight or even nine) I have no continuous memory and can recall only a few detached incidents and scenes: nor does that child seem to have any recognisable connection with the man whom I became. Most people remember further back into childhood than I can, but the point here is that we remember a mere small sample of the millions and millions of impressions which life has made upon us. Nevertheless, those forgotten impressions have contributed to the upbuilding of the complex entity which we are. In a word, we do not remember our present life half so definitely as we suppose. Nevertheless, it is possible that we remember much more of our long-past lives than we think we do. Psychoanalyists make a speciality of dragging to the surface forgotten or suppressed incidents which have left fears, distresses or obliquities in the mind of a patient. Many of our tastes, talents, dispositions, and even loves or dislikes, may be the fruit of experiences in old lives which we do not remember with any definition because we have subsequently passed through the two major operations of death and birth. We start with a new equipment, with a brain which has to adjust itself quickly to immediate conditions: and it is worth consideration that if we actually recalled in any detail even three or four of our past lives we could hardly support such a load of memories. There are some persons who reject the theory of reincarnation on the strange ground that they have no wish to live again on so sad a planet: as though we can expect to pick and choose among the laws of Nature. . . .

I see reincarnation as merely the mechanism by which the soul, coming from its own region, manages to float itself along the semi-psychic life-stream and to land up on the shore of our familiar physical world; and it may well be that Time is broken up by our three dimensions as a beam of light may be broken into prismatic colours. If

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this be so, reincarnation is largely an illusion, for that which (if we could see it in vision) would appear as a chain of lives might well be a single experience. Obviously, however, reincarnation cannot be proved to the satisfaction of the intellect. We may accept the idea because it rings true, and according to many mystics we could recover a memory of other lives if we would train our memories as intensively as an athlete trains for a race.

X

How well I realise that this view of things would seem fantastic or utterly unbelievable to "the average sensual man". I realise also that it is as much out of the mode as it could be. But if we are destined to survive Death we shall almost certainly find ourselves in surprising and disconcerting conditions: and the more we embed ourselves in the conditions of this present life, the greater will be our surprise. Most clearly of all I realise that nobody would seriously ponder these ideas if he were not to start by feeling the strangeness of everything—of the universe, of his own existence, and even of his complicated body with its incalculable pedigree. "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom," said Plato. Perhaps he meant no more than curiosity, for curiosity is the beginning of science; but he may have meant something much deeper—as, for instance, that until existence itself seems wonderful we have no chance of catching even a glimpse of the truth. Who can forget that "traditional saying" of Jesus: "He that wonders shall reign, and he that reigns shall rest. Look with wonder at that which is before you"?

The soul is more present in the world than the world's general grossness would make us think. We have lived in an abominable period, an age as evil and violent as any in our records, but many people continue to act with disinterested love and so to manifest that they are not (in Thomas Huxley's phrase) mere "conscious automata".

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In my view, everyone is essentially invisible, a spirit—as we say; but I see also that in many a man and woman the spirit has ceased to show itself. How strange it was that a critic should, for example, have censured a novelist for saying that the flowers in a garden have definite "personalities"! That critic was fast asleep. He can never have subdued his inborn "ego" sufficiently to wonder why flowers are of so many shapes and so many colours, or to ask himself, "How did they devise their beauty, and why?" Emerson, who knew that "in addition to being tax-payers we are also immortal souls", came nearer to the truth about ourselves and our universe when he wrote:

The round world and all we see
Is nine times folded in mystery,

and only last night Captain C. B. Fry said abruptly, "There is something strange and marvellous in everything that we look at. Why don't people realise what is so obvious?"

XI

At this point in my lifelong meditation I looked at the bald face of the clock in the Porters' Lodge and saw that I had overstayed my fire vigil by some five-and-twenty minutes. I wondered why Dr. Murray, so gentle a soul in so upright a body, did not come to relieve my watch. Yes, he must have been oversleeping. Now, they say that we have forgotten the power of invocation and, having this in mind, I picked up the porters' almost Pompeian pen, drew the fire-watching logbook towards me and inscribed there the couplet, a solemn invocation—

Dawn may delay her steps, but hurry—
Dear rosy-fingered Dr. Murray.

Almost immediately I heard footsteps advancing down the Rope Walk, and just as I was heaping my scribbled pages into a dispatch-case, Dr. Murray himself, sleepy, contrite and rosy-fingered, entered the lodge and, like a reincarnating soul, took up again in the selfsame spot as aforetime his duties as a fire-watcher.

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Chapter Five

ART AND ARISTOCRACY

I

A DARK young man whose name . . . but indeed,
You'll have guessed him a Scotsman, shrewd reader, at sight,
And really, shrewd reader, you're very near right,

for his name is Gordon Mackenzie . . . noting the approach of V.E. Day, was so kind as to include me in a small Victory-in-Europe dinner at the Berkeley Hotel. He had already invited the magnificent Russo-Grecian, Ingraa d'Etter Bulgarides, and also Nicholas Marangos, the finest friend whom any woman can ever have had. "I think," my host suggested on the telephone, "that here is a fitting occasion for getting out our dinner-jackets!" I agreed and then discovered with a thankful heart that during the last six months only a moth or two had enjoyed a light luncheon at my expense.

Remembering the wild celebrations on the eleventh of November, 1918, and the girls and soldiers uproariously singing on the taxi-roofs, and how some Australians at nightfall had burnt a German howitzer at the base of the Nelson Column, I had looked forward for some weeks to this new peace festival, thinking that not to visit Piccadilly Circus on such an evening would be to waste my life-look at the affairs of this curious planet. As I set out for the hotel there was no traffic in Piccadilly. That broad thoroughfare had become a promenade for an endless and orderly crowd. Here and there small families were squatting on the pavements, busy with their picnic suppers. Why was there so little wildness in that great throng? The

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expunge our wild juvenile underlinings or marginalia—so often confidently inscribed with the blackest of ink—but why should we want to pretend that we alone were born with unerring taste? Time and again I am astonished by the literary appreciations of soldiers and doctors who have used most of their lives in attending to other matters. They may not recoil from a collision of sibilants or from various minute points of careless technique, but these are the concern only of a lifelong specialist. All the arts are interrelated, but I know that even now my pleasure in music is that of an amateur: and they say that my taste in pictorial art is woefully uncertain and far too "literary".

If a sure taste is dependent on leisure and cannot be acquired in less than half a lifetime, it is not likely to be general. Most of our fellow-citizens are preoccupied with family affairs and the earning of a livelihood. The arts are to them as politics are to me, a matter of considerable interest but not of specialisation. We might therefore have expected that artists would instinctively support the existence of an aristocratic class with the leisure to develop fine taste and the means to encourage good art. Professor Trevelyan, in his *English Social History,* indicates that we had such a class in England during the eighteenth century, and that the beautiful workmanship of that period, from architecture to the fashioning of spoons, was due to the presence of an intelligent aristocracy. The aristocrat, supported by society, ought to realise that he must set an example of disinterested public service, courage, sensitive manners and discriminating taste. Many Georgians did so, but their Victorian descendants, not at all assisted by Edward the Seventh, took little interest in science or philosophy and even less in literature or the arts. One of them, a colonel and an old Etonian, having received an invitation to dine with the Archbishop of York, turned to his wife and asked, "Who is this fellow 'Ebor'? Do we know him?" At this moment, we may be certain, the Prince Consort turned in his grave and groaned.

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In the nineteenth century our aristocrats cheerfully despised all culture though a care for it would have been the sole justification for their existence. They were philistines, they vulgarised their privileges, and the arts were thrown to democracy. For the arts do seem to have flowered most splendidly in periods of intelligent patronage from the Few. Apart from the English noblemen of the eighteenth century, we think at once of Pericles, Maecenas, Lorenzo, and some of the Popes; of Henry the Seventh and Henry the Eighth, who instigated our noblest architecture; of Louis the XIVth and Louis the XVth; of Charles the First, George the Fourth, the Prince Consort, and Ludwig of Bavaria.

Everyone recognises how uncertain in its effect was the patronage of princes or prelates, but we ought at least to acknowledge that the artist is likely to fare worse if he is expected to please the average preoccupied citizen or a Trades Union Council. Neither one nor the other can have had time to distinguish the best from the second-best. Professor Trevelyan, referring to the latter half of the eighteenth century, offers the significant judgement that "the reading world was just the size to give great literature its best chance. Milton was then known and honoured only less than Shakespeare." If we compare the rewards won in our own time by H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett with those of Joseph Conrad and W. B. Yeats, we can see at once what has happened.

III

The leftward trend of modern artists is probably due to humanitarianism, to an increased sympathy with the "masses"; and most people would say that a decline in craftsmanship and in taste is of no importance by comparison with an improvement in the condition of the "workers". A writer recently uttered the arresting opinion that men and women are either cynics or sentimentalists.

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like it will have to put up with it. Style, manners and dinner-jackets may disappear as wholly as knee-breeches or as magnificent English on our stage. These changes were inevitable. It is only surprising that artists and writers should rejoice in them. They, we might have surmised, were destined to be the world's natural aristocrats.

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Chapter Six

MEMBERS ONLY

I

Now, all you nymphs of woodland or river, whether you be slim as larches or strong as wide-shouldered Caryatides; and likewise all you tamer nymphs, alleviators of my melancholy and comforters of my later life, whether you masquerade in the public playhouses, or get melody from the nimble jacks, or limn deft miniatures, or out of the Staffordshire clay mould amorous nincompoops; and you, O dames who were the nymphs of my nonage, whether you now pour into politics the ardour which once you dedicated to poetry or, high on your Hampstead hills, write lovingly of childhood and for children or, it may be, blow forth your red-tipped arrows of irony against privilege and the Tories; now—now, I say, O nymphs and dames—abandon me, go about your innumerable businesses, albeit not wholly forgetting me, for here is arcane and masonic matter unfitted and wearisome to the feminine ear: but oh, you satyrs, fauns and ever-piping shepherds, you companions of my happy cricket-years, you school-inspectors, headmasters, Anglo-Indian barristers, Imperial chemists, poets, novelists and composers, gather once more about your old cricket-captain, bring your chairs to the fire, light your cigarettes or briars, brim your tumblers and let me discourse about first-class cricket (not our kind) as it was in 1884, and about the Democratisation of Wisden.

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II

What a genial age it was—at least for the well-to-do: and in order to be well-to-do in 1884 you did not need, if you were unmarried, a private income of more than four-hundred-a-year. Armed with this pleasant unearned increment, as it came to be stigmatised, you could lead a life of leisure and pleasure and, if you had enough gift for the game, could play county-cricket as an amateur from the first of May till the middle of September. Of course, the young man who, beguiled perhaps by the fountain, the ferns and the fairy-lights in the conservatory, proposed marriage to his dancing-partner, might need to "work in the city", unless "the Old Man" conveniently pegged out and . . . We shall never know, but I can guess, how many young elegants thought, as one of them said to me twenty years later, "Hang it all! the Old Man can't live forever!"

If we try to invoke the feeling of that epoch we must begin by realising the Political Scene. Mr. Gladstone was facetiously termed "the downy one of Downing Street" (downy meant *sly*). Mr. Parnell, who had not yet loved his way into disaster, was equated (by *Punch*) with "an underhand". France had recovered from the German defeat of 1870, or so "the world and his wife" (a phrase of that period) supposed: and Bismarck's Germany did not look, in those halcyon days, like the militaristic monster which, forty and sixty years later, was to muddy the river of English literature for the length of two generations. That year, 1884, was notable in several ways. Swinburne, already under lock and key in Putney, was churning out the empty, mellifluous and interminable couplets of his still-born *Tristram of Lyonesse*. Will anybody ever again read through that flatulent piece? Of course not: it is as dead as are most of Tennyson's oily "Idylls" or Browning's long-winded and shapeless ramblings. How mistaken Mr. Browning was when he supposed that posterity would enjoy the spectacle of Mr. Browning trying out his ideas

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on the cat or, in other words, not disposing of his problem before beginning to make rhymes about it. An artist should do his thinking in the workshop. Browning published little else but experimental sketches. Only two years ago that marvellous and magnetic pure-artist, D. G. Rossetti, who said that he did not care whether the sun went round the earth or the earth round the sun, so little was he overawed by science and Mr. Darwin, had died at Birchington, incongruously tended by the now-forgotten best-seller Hall Caine. Somewhere in the glooms of Chelsea, old dyspeptic Carlyle was still spluttering forth his uncouth periods and imposing himself upon his contemporaries as a philosopher of importance. At Oxford, Mr. Walter Pater, with his prim cavalry-officer appearance, was writing prose with such care that George Moore, thirty years later, was to observe trenchantly, "In Pater's prose the English language lies in state,"—is, in fact, magnificently dead: but young aspirants in authorship still were awed by Pater's mummified perfection. Whistler and Oscar Wilde were now amusing Society with their pranks, and even the suburbs, if not the sterner provinces, were striving to appreciate beauty. Burne-Jones and Frederick Leighton, that superb draughtsman who for the last thirty years has been so ludicrously underrated, were reaping the financial harvest of the "Aesthetic Movement" which, as somebody remarked some twenty years ago, "almost for a little while made London a centre of civilisation." At the same time, however, Gilbert and Sullivan were assuring "the commonplace type with a stick and a pipe and a half-bred black-and-tan" that he was worth infinitely more than "the greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery, out-of-the-way young man," and, helped by Du Maurier with his delineation of drawing-rooms overcrowded with Japanese fans, ostrich feathers and bric-à-brac, were heartily telling the average Briton that he ought not to bother his head about art and poetry and elegance. It may have been unfortunate but there it is—the prejudice of the nation was

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behind Gilbert and Du Maurier, and in consequence the art-conscious countries of Europe still regard us as mere beef-eaters and fox-hunters.

The typical young man of this epoch seems on Saturdays to have worn tweeds, knickerbockers and a low-crowned bowler hat. His young woman wore a bustle and a little round fur hat, rather like a muff, and she had to pretend that she was much less intelligent and much more impressed by male "knowledge of the world" than in reality she was. During the week top hats were universal. Even frequenters of gin-palaces wore them.

At stag parties, which in London would then be the rule rather than exception, men would be perturbed by nothing more world-shattering than "the Egyptian Question". "Chinese" Gordon might conceivably have crept into the conversation as the port went round for the third time: and even county cricketers, rarely remarkable for intellect, may have been aware that young Mr. Pinero had three plays running at the moment, and that young Joe Chamberlain of Birmingham was an audacious and even a dangerous radical. No radical, let us realise, could hope to enter one of "the clubs"; and even Pinero was beginning to write plays to which it would not be safe to take your sister, your aunt, or even your pretty cousin. And, talking of the Fair or Weaker Sex, what a dashed good toast old Gumbleton had proposed, two nights ago, when he lifted his glass of port wine and called out, "To Our Wives and Sweethearts: may they never meet!" Old Gumbleton had deserved that boisterous acclamation. This epoch, too, was pre-eminently the Epoch of the Pun and the Practical Joke. The heyday of the country-house party was also the heyday of the pitcher that soused you as you opened your bedroom door and of the applepie bed itself. Puns were evidently in grave danger of misfiring, and the punster had usually to italicise his point. For example, if you wanted to be witty about the campaign for "three acres and a cow," you drew in your hostess's album three molars and an

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invalid with a bottle of cough-mixture at his elbow, and under this effort you would write, "Three achers and a cough (cow)!"

For the rest, let us imagine that there were no tube-railways, no motor vehicles of any kind, that Hampstead was unimaginably remote from Balham or Chelsea, that most journeys were made by means of the plodding "growler" (a horse-drawn four-wheeler), that the swift, smart "hansom-cab" was called "the London gondola", that lively young men careered along country lanes on their penny-farthing cycles, that lawn-tennis was officially placed under the patronage of the much more esteemed game of croquet, that typewriters were looked upon as new-fangled contraptions from the giddy United States and, finally, that in all probability not a single cricketer whose name appears in "Wisden" for 1884 possessed a telephone or had even spoken into one. It was in this year that the Poet Laureate (Tennyson) became a peer—the first man to become a lord of the realm because he was already "a lord of language."

III

The paper-bound *Almanack* itself is of pocketable size and was sold at one shilling, not at all like the crop-crammed squat yellow volumes which cricketers bought for five shillings between 1920 and 1939. The title-page tells the hesitant purchaser that in addition to recording the scores of every important match, the Almanack contains "other information useful and interesting to Cricketers." First, however, let us turn over the advertisements, for there is nothing like old advertisements to bring back the aroma of the past. What would we not give for a glance at the hieroglyphical advertisements in *The Egyptian Times* for 31 B.C.? I conceive that, as the Stock Exchange would say, "asps were lively."

We find on page 4 a somewhat smudged woodcut of a

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marquee which has been pegged into place on the fringe of a field which makes me surmise that the pitch, out of view, must be a fiery length of wild meadowland: and outside the marquee a bearded gentleman, propped up by his own bat, talks to a lady in a bustled dress and a pork-pie hat, and also to a bell-shaped child whose back-view reminds me of Alice in Wonderland. The advertiser, Mr. Benjamin Edgington, offers "New and Elegant Shapes in Tents, in Fancy Colours, for the Lawn Tennis Grounds, without side lines." What can be the lost meaning of those final three words? In what way did "side lines" disgrace a tent? Or were they extravagances for which the lawn-tennis enthusiast must expect to pay tribute? Alas, I fear that Mr. Edgington cannot now be in a position to give us an authoritative ruling. On the next page, we meet those imperishable phantoms of Nottinghamshire cricket, Shaw and Shrewsbury, who, like a couple of Roman slavers, cry boldly, "Professional Bowlers sent to All Parts" and, mindful that if summer is here winter cannot be far behind, offer their "Patent Anhydrous Footballs." Was it Shaw or was it Shrewsbury, we wonder, who unearthed that word "anhydrous"? Another mystery lies buried in Thurston's boast that he alone can supply billiard-players with "the new Electric Cloth", a statement so captivating that I really think I must walk round to Leicester Square one afternoon and find out the exact virtue of that Electric Cloth.

Then, too, is it not aromatic of the period that *Cricket,* a tuppenny summer-weekly, should declare that it "has an enormous circulation *for a Class Paper*"? And is there not a suggestion of infinite leisure in the fact that a firm of cricket-ball manufacturers in Woolwich quotes this purple passage from *The Field*—"Poets and Philosophers in all ages have given mankind to understand that everything must perish with handling and using, and the whole world has hitherto bowed to the natural decree. Messrs. Jefferies and Co. have, it would seem, discovered a law of resistance" . . . etc. The author—who can doubt

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it?—plumed himself upon his arch but magnificent prose. I have also a suspicion that any true golfer (Mr. Darwin, forward, please) may find pleasure and possibly surprise in learning that a Scottish manufacturer could have supplied his grandfather with "Play Clubs, Long Spoons, Mid Spoons, Short Spoons, Putters, Niblicks, Sand Irons, Cleeks, Driving Cleeks, Lofting Irons, Niblicks (what would Freud make of this repetition?) and Brasseys": and yet, best of all, perhaps, is the advertisement of the irresponsible Dr. J. Collis Browne, who recommends his chlorodyne for cholera, dysentry, diarrhoea, epilepsy, spasms, colic, palpitation, hysteria, neuralgia, gout, cancer, and toothache.

IV

In April, John Wisden (whose *Almanack* we are examining with such happy minuteness) died. He was only 5 feet 4 inches in height, and partly for that reason was known as "the little wonder". What had been wonderful was his bowling, the wee man having on one occasion clean-bowled every batsman on the other side, an unique achievement. We learn, too, that he was "a fast friend and a generous employer," and that's epitaph enough for most of us. . . .

The first oddity in his *Almanack* to strike us is that it contains no County Championship Table and no batting averages or bowling analyses for the season. Clearly, "the Championship", a passionate concern of all right-thinking English boys ever since my own boyhood, existed only, if at all, in the pages of *Bell's London Life*. Then—O ye cricketers, imagine it!—the Australians were over here, a mighty team as I will soon make manifest, and we also had as visitors a team of "Gentlemen from Philadelphia": and, here is my point, "Wisden" opens with a detailed account of the Americans, and packs away the scores of the Australian matches at the end of the book. Still, it is worth while to examine these American games with the aid of *The American Cricketer*. The M.C.C. behaved

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with suitable magnificence, entertaining the Philadelphians to "dinner in the fine dining-room on the ground." How pleasing it is to hear that "toasts to the Queen and the President of the United States were drunk"; and it is perhaps even more nostalgically delightful to learn that "last but not least, old Mr. Broughton was present, who played in the Eton eleven in 1830 and is today as keen in his enthusiasm for the game as the youngest junior in Philadelphia." Old Mr. Broughton (whoever he may have been) was a schoolboy when Keats and Shelley were alive—a thrilling fancy. . . .

These Philadelphians were well treated. They were never subjected to the ignominy of having to play against a professional cricketer. What an incident, moreover, occurred at Bristol when the Americans played "the Gentlemen of Gloucestershire"! Believe me, dear reader, "W. G. Grace was the last out, and fell," says Wisden, "to a splendid catch at mid-off from a very hard hit which turned the fieldsman completely round. . . ." That fielder has long since joined his forefathers, but can we not share his stunning exultation? "... Grace," the report continues, somewhat to my surprise, "showed his appreciation of this fine piece of fielding by making Thayer a present of his bat on the spot." There's an Elizabethan gesture for you! But what, oh, what—Mr. Thayer's descendants—has become of that historical bat? Is it somewhere in Philadelphia, and shall I someday actually see it? Again, how handsomely the Kent players entertained "our cousins", for we read that "Lord Harris turned up at 8 o'clock, with three open carriages, and took a number of the party, including the ladies, to see Leeds Castle, one of the oldest Kentish fortresses, which has been turned into a modern residence."

The Americans were certainly preferred as against the Australians because they were genuine amateurs: and this was the golden age of the amateur cricketer. We find, for example, that few county teams have more than two pro-

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fessionals and they, of course, are bowlers. Somerset played an eleven of esquires against Kent: and there were only four professionals on the ground when Surrey played Middlesex at Lord's. Cricket was manifestly still a "gentleman's game"—like Rugby football. The Vice-Presidents of the Kent County Cricket Club consist, we are told, of "Twenty-eight Noblemen and Gentlemen of the County"; and every amateur throughout the book is entered as an esquire. In the 'Varsity Match, naturally, twenty-two esquires were engaged: and—would you believe it?—so important did that match seem at the time that it is described at three times the length which is accorded to any of the three Test Matches. Perhaps there is also an attempt to keep out the profane crowd in the fact that too many people—more than 27,000—had attended the Eton and Harrow match in 1873: with the result that the entrance-charge was raised in 1874 from one shilling to half-a-crown. The attendance dropped satisfactorily to 15,000, and the players' mothers, aunts, cousins, and sisters were once more able to parade their pretty summer dresses in comfort.

Before we pay a ghostly visit to some of the Australian matches, let us press out a few more drops of this Old-World Essence, observing, for example, that when Gloucestershire was to meet Yorkshire at Bradford, "the brothers E. M. and W. G. Grace" did not play "owing to the death of their mother." Is it not like reading that the Mother of the Gracchi, instead of the Graces, had put on mortality, or even as though Halley's Comet had astonishingly expired? Knowing all that we do know about "the Coroner" and his fanatical passion for the game, we may believe that E.M., if not perhaps the immortal W.G., must have gnashed his teeth when he thought of that game at Bradford—going on without him. Then, too, it was still Wisden's custom in 1884 to express admiration of any undefeated batsman who had managed to score at least twenty by printing the words *not out* in italics. Think of it (Wisden seems to be saying), he scored twenty runs

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and even then he was actually *not out*! And for some of us who have followed the fortunes of cricket throughout this century, there is charm in the thought that little Bobby Abel, destined to make such colossal scores for Surrey, was now twenty-four, uncertain of his place in the team and apparently looked upon as a considerable bowler: and lastly, what a "historic shiver", as Flaubert called the sensation, comes to us when we read that "Alexander Hearne" of Kent had acquitted himself with much credit considering that he "is a mere youth in his first county season." Nobody, at least for sixty years, has heard of Alexander Hearne, but who that loves cricket will ever forget Kent's invaluable all-rounder whose only recognisable name is Alec Hearne? I am told that he still lives. If it is so, come —all you readers—here's a health to "Alexander"!

V

And now let us look at these formidable Australians. They included that notable stonewaller A. C. Bannerman, who met his counterpart in Louis Hall of Yorkshire and in Scotton of Nottinghamshire . . . and who can forget how a parodist once wrote the lines:

> Block, block, block,
> At the foot of thy wicket, O Scotton . . .

but, even if Alec Bannerman failed to score, there was whiskered Murdoch, regarded by Australians as their counterblast to W.G. himself; George Giffen, a fine all-rounder; Midwinter, the only cricketer who played both for Australia and for England; G. J. Bonnor, that beautiful, bearded Hercules, who stood six-feet-six in his socks and who looks as if in a couple of days he could have cleared a square mile of the Bush; Blackham, who taught our own wicket-keepers that it was possible to "stand up" to the wicket even when "taking" the fastest bowlers; Boyle and Palmer, two tricky trundlers; and . . . and . . . much virtue

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in "and"! . . . the Demon himself! Spofforth has been finely immortalised as "the most hostile" of all bowlers in any country or any period. At the end of the season he had bowled 1586 overs (of four balls), 656 of which had remained "intacta", and his opponents had scored—often, no doubt, from the bat's edge—2642 runs: yes! but the Demon meanwhile had sent 216 batsmen sadly home to the pavilion.

In these days, when centuries are much commoner than blackberries, we read with wide eyes that the match between the Australians and the M.C.C. was "extraordinary for the fact that three batsmen scored over 100 runs in one innings." Who were they? Did I hear you ask that, Hugh Prew? Why, W.G. made 101, A. G. Steel, Esq., made 134, and W. Barnes returned to the pavilion at Lord's *not out* 105. T. C. O'Brien, Esq., hit up 72, little knowing that in the 'Varsity Match he, the star batsman of the game, was destined to make a Pair of Spectacles. These, however, were early days, and probably also cold days—at least by an Australian standard. During the very next week Spofforth, having taken seven wickets for thirty-four runs in the first innings of a match with an "Eleven of England", followed it up by taking in the Eleven's second innings seven wickets for three. . . . Here, indeed, was matter for chatter at the Clubs and the Pubs!

The term "Test Match" had not then been discovered, but the first "Australia *v.* England" game was played at Manchester on July 11th and 12th (July 10th, on Thursday, had been washed out by the usual Manchester deluge). It looks as though the Australians would have won. They had an innings in hand and needed only to score 94 runs. We shall realise very soon that this result was something of a shock to our comfortable old cricketers in their club armchairs. The second of the three great matches began a week-and-a-half later, but I want to attend that particular game with my reader, and to enjoy it at some leisure—is not leisureliness the secret of cricket's

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charm?—and so let us first look forward into what was then the unknown future and note that the third and last Test Match was played at the Oval, and that the Australians amassed no fewer than 551 runs, including three centuries. England "replied" with a gallant 346, and it was in this match that Mr. W. W. Read, furious because W.G. had sent him in as No. 10, arrived with the score at 181 for 8 wickets and with Scotton, fortunately stonewalling, with 53 runs to his name. Read, batting with berserker passion, actually scored 117, and we are left to imagine the look in his Surrey eyes when he came back triumphantly to his own pavilion and confronted W.G. He had certainly saved the game which, like the earlier Test, ended as a draw.

Going back now to Monday, the 21st of July, 1884, I invite you to put a parcel of sandwiches and a bottle of wine or gingerbeer (according to your age at this time) into your neat black bag, and to spend three happy days on the hard seats at Lord's. Who's playing? Well, of course we already know the names of the Australian team: but who is playing for us? What a crowd there is, what a multitude of silk hats, what a congregation of brakes and victorias already assembled, and gay with pretty women, on the circumference of the ground. . . . Is it possible to get a score-card? Yes, there's a boy! I'll keep the two seats if you'll buy a card. Splendid! you succeeded, and well, who are they? The Champion, of course! And then? Lucas, Shrewsbury (he's a dour bat), Ulyett (a stubborn tyke), A. G. Steel (has done well, lately), Lord Harris, Barlow, W. W. Read, the Honourable A. Lyttelton (after all, he's the wicket-keeper), Peate and S. Christopherson, Esq. Yes, it's a strong team, but we shall have to play hard if we are to wipe out the memory of that near-defeat only ten days ago. . . .

The crowd is enormous, and in addition to innumerable out-of-work working-men, how many curates have a dark passion for cricket! Look, too, at the Pavilion, thronged even at 11.30 by those Olympian beings who are Members

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of the M.C.C. You and I will never creep into that august preserve, but what does it matter? We can delight in the artistry of this English game as perceptively as any man in those long white seats to left and right of the narrow and fateful entrance to the pavilion.

There are the umpires . . . and a young woman on my left irreverently asks, "who are the two house-painters, George?" and of course George's muffled answer is quite inaudible . . . yes, the umpires, but who are they? Ferrands and Pullen, so the score-card says: and oh, what bliss to be at that moment either Pullen or Ferrands! They have passed into oblivion, no doubt, like sandcastles washed away by the tide, but still—those umpires had a greater moment of glory, as they strolled on to the greensward at Headquarters, than any which you or I are likely to enjoy. Ah—look, look! the English team is coming out to field. The Australians have won the toss. Who will start their innings? M'Donnell and stonewaller Bannerman: and our own bowlers? Peate of Yorkshire, a subtle left-hander who has no idea that he is founding a dynasty of slow left-handers in the persons of Peel, Rhodes and Verity. Yes, Peate and, at the other end, Barlow—who, in turn, has no idea that some day Francis Thompson ("O my Hornby and my Barlow long ago.") will immortalise him in the only cricket-poem which is a first-rate lyric. Good gracious me, and just look at that, and can you believe your eyes? Peate has clean-bowled M'Donnell for a duck! Those small boys over yonder will obviously never forget that thrilling moment, not even if they are alive in the unimaginable year of 1950. . . . Well, the July sun slowly crosses the rich deep sky, and the enemy have done rather badly to lose 9 wickets for 160. We certainly ought to win —why, W.G. or Shrewsbury could easily score as many runs by themselves: except, of course, that the Demon will be bowling. But as the sun droops a little to the west what a characteristically tough stand for the last wicket those Australians are making. Who would ever have dreamed

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that Boyle, no batsman at all, could resist the bowling of Ulyett, Peate, Mr. Christopherson and Mr. Grace himself? But he does, and as for this fellow H. J. H. Scott, he takes no time to knock up a half-century, and he is still there. The score is 200 now: and now it is 220. You never know when you have done with these Australians—and really, we must begin to be thankful that Blackham, their wicket-keeper, was run-out before he had scored. Ah, you see! Dr. Grace has decided to give Mr. A. G. Steel a try with the ball . . . and at last! Yes, at last the man Scott is caught for a noble score of seventy-five.

The only good thing about an interval is that everybody can get up and stretch his legs. The ladies are manifestly wilting for lack of tea but they are too tactful, too conscious of their escorts' obsession with this game, to ask if tea is obtainable. That is not the sole defect of this lordly ground to which we commonplace folk are admitted only on sufferance, and I must say I incline to exclaim with the rhymester:

> Give me the Oval for choice: there the game quite as cleverly played is,
> And yet you may get sight, or seat, which you can't at Lord's, e'en for the ladies.

There it is, though—what Englishman worth his salt could keep away from a Test Match? And there they come on to the field as the shadow of the pavilion stalks gradually forward, there they come, these Australians from the other side of our planet: and there's Dr. Grace with his great black beard of a Khalif in the Arabian Nights, and . . . They're batting carefully but safely, and that is just as it should be, for after all the Australians did morally win that first game against the flower of England's cricket less than a fortnight ago. Oh—my dear man! Grace is out, caught by the stupendous Bonner . . . a serious blow: and presently, just as we are thinking that we might as well leave the ground while the going is reasonable, A. P. Lucas, Esq. is out in just the same way: and heavens alive! Blackham

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has just whipped off the bails, and our great Shrewsbury has to trudge back to the pavilion. Well, well—the score is 90 for 3: and that's the end of play, and I suppose you can really say that it is anybody's match?

On the second day, England's cricket was magnificently reglorified. A. G. Steele, Esq., supported by Ulyett, Barlow, and Hon. A. Lyttelton, stayed while 261 runs were scored and of these he himself had made 148 before Palmer eventually bowled him. The "tail wagged", and our score in the end was 379. Then the Australians batted again, and obviously Ulyett was bowling his best. When those umpires "drew" the stumps, Australia had lost four wickets for 73. They had little chance of victory on Wednesday, July 23rd: nor is it necessary to imagine in detail the story of their collapse—the whole side was out for 145—but the innings was memorable for one of the most amazing catches that any cricketer has ever made. What is the worth of my flat-footed, unlovely, unemotional prose? Let me give way to an enthusiastic old versifier in *Punch* (born, very likely, before Shelley was drowned) who, to begin with, tells us that in the vast crowd, now so shadowy, there were:

> Little 'uns, tiptoeing wildly, all huddled together like sheep, Sir,
> Standing on boxes and biscuit-tins, balancing, fowl-like, on rails.
> Perched upon baskets inverted, on flower-pots, brickbats and pails.

Am I wrong in fancying that this kindly old spectator had construed in his boyhood a good many of Virgil's hexameters, and that the ring of them was still in his ears? Be that as it may, he continues dramatically with these enthusiastic couplets:

> Bravo, my boys! this looks better. I was really beginning to feel
> A little bit down in the mouth; but that rattling 'three figures' by Steel
> Has stiffened my upper lip greatly,[1] and as for a catch, 'pon my honour
> I never saw anything finer than Ulyett's dismissal of Bonnor!

[1] Can this be the origin of the well-known "stiff upper lip"?

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Bang from the Whopping One's bat went the ball like a bullet, a hot 'un!
Looked good for six—when hillo! "By Great Mungo," yelled one, "he has got 'un!"

There are you, dear cricketers of my game-time, immortality can be attained, as it was by Ulyett, in an instant, or it may be the slow accretion, the coral-atoll, of an industrious and long life.

VI

Francis Thompson in his first cricket-poem thinks regretfully of his Hornby and his Barlow long ago: and in recollection he heard "the soundless clapping host" as "the run-stealers flicker to-and-fro". This will be for all time the supreme cricket-lyric, and in its beauty it is not much below the supreme lyric of all lyrics—"Tears, idle tears." For my part, being of a later generation, I want to cry out:

"O my Jessop and my Ranji long ago!"

for I did see Prince Ranjitsinhji make 44 graceful runs for the Gentlemen against the Players in 1896 (it was my birthday-treat) and I did see Mr. Jessop, who is still breathing, knock up 52 at a desperate moment in one of our matches against those grim Australians. And you who are reading this chronicle of very small achievements done very long ago, will you not also have your heroes, your Hornbys, your Barlows, your Jessops and your Ranji's? I shall not know their names or their deeds: but I conjure you not wholly to forget

My Jessop and my Ranji long ago!

Perhaps I should add that, as a small boy on a holiday at Ilkley, I saw Peate bowl in a village match: and that in the same year, 1898, on the Hampstead Cricket Ground, I saw "the Demon" himself in action.

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Chapter Seven

STYLE

Soon after the outbreak of the Second German War I found myself, as the guest of a well-loved friend, sitting in a large and beautiful country garden on a gentle September afternoon. The occasion recalled a day in August 1914 when Edward Thomas joined me for lunch at the old Eustace-Miles Restaurant where, after we had ordered our nutlets, he surprised me by saying, "Well, there doesn't seem much point now in writing about Nature." Presumably he was unaware that he was just on the brink of turning from prose to poetry and of achieving by that very change his own meed of literary remembrance. Twenty-five years later I had to recognise that I could play only the humblest part in the titanic struggle which faced my country, and being in a sorrowful state of mind I remembered that the Royal Society of Literature, which was inaugurated by George the Fourth, had asked me to give one of its lectures: for here, I thought, is the time and the place for composing it, and in order to steady myself I decided to speak on a subject of permanent interest—literary style.

The Society, however, postponed this lecture, and it was not until April 1943 that, coming up from Cambridge, I faced my erudite audience. Needless to say, I stole the opportunity of walking past the Vigo Street end of Albany, from which I could look up at the cracked windows of my old rooms. The creepers which had been so zealously trained in happier years were still bravely clinging to the rails of the antique balcony, but the vine had never recovered from the shock of "The Burlington Bomb."[1]

[1] See *Evenings in Albany*.

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Mr. Walter de la Mare referred to the following talk on Style as "witty, astringent and fastidious", nor would I at all complain if the reader, listening to this ghostly discourse, were to feel that he can endorse a verdict so valuable.

I

Some little time ago a reviewer said of a novelist, "He writes sensibly, and that is what I call good writing." Now, unless you are a James Joyce or a Gertrude Stein, you will probably desire to write sensibly; and perhaps you will take as your pattern the preface to the *London Telephone Directory*. I do not see that this reviewer need wish for a better. If "good writing" implies only good sense, we ought presumably to regard grace, eloquence, power and verbal music as so many unnecessary fripperies. After all, a Baptist Chapel with its roof of corrugated iron is a sensible building, and only affected persons will consider the cathedral at Chartres to be in any way preferable.

Quite recently, too, a reviewer in *The Spectator*, praising a book by a courageous airman, concluded with the words: "And he, having obviously very little training in professional writing, has fallen back on the method of simplicity, truthfulness and reliance on observed impressions. As a result, the style is flawless." Well, what do you say to that? I do not understand whether the airman is to be regarded as fortunate or unfortunate in so obviously having had little training as a writer, nor do I see at all clearly how anyone can make a method of simplicity; but as a result—partly, remember, of having obviously no training—the style of his book is said to be flawless.

I have quoted these reviewers because both are assuring us that literature needs only to be simple and sensible; and in taking this standpoint they are, I am convinced, anticipating, as good journalists, the attitude towards writing which will soon be fashionable. There will be a cult of plainness. We may even be told, over and over again, that

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Toughness is All; and this approaching fashion will be part of a general recognition that the after-war world should belong to the Little Man, the Plain Man, the Common Man, who (they will tell us) "won the war". Does it not follow that literature ought to be guided by his taste? Editors and journalists will not be slow to recognise that the customer is always right; and the customer will be the Plain Man who derives more pleasure from Dickens than from Turgenev, more pleasure from a newspaper than from Dickens. We shall, therefore, find that during the next fifteen or twenty years reviewers will write as though elegance were effeminate, magnificence mere ostentation, and subtlety a pathological symptom. If we are worth our salt, if we have any independence of judgement, if we refuse to be told what it is that we should enjoy, then we shall stand firm against so craven a fashion, and wait for it to pass. Do I say "to pass"? Surely, the aristocratic, the mandarin ideal has gone for good? Surely, kind manners and fastidious taste are for evermore as antiquated as the clouded cane, or the massive English of Edward Gibbon? Nevertheless, not even a fervent socialist can be quite sure of the changes that may be round the corner.

II

When the pipes burst we would sooner see the plumber than Plato, but only by reviewers' logic does this fact mean that the plumber is the greater man of the two. And when our country is in mortal peril, we rightly honour the men of action; but, just as a society outgrows its pioneering period, so will the world eventually recover its balance and begin to appreciate once more those intellectual and aesthetic pleasures which give distinction to a man's mind. The engineer and the mechanic—valuable citizens though they are—will not for ever be regarded as the finest specimens of humanity, nor will the tastes of the Common Man be for ever extolled as the standard to which all men should

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attempt to conform. For two decades we have called a man "a romantic" when we desired to say politely that he was a fool. For the next two decades we shall find that the last insult is to call a man "a connoisseur". And why? Because all men cannot be connoisseurs. If they could be, the word would mean nothing; but while the Common Man is enjoying his apotheosis, it will obviously be almost criminal to have pleasures and perceptions which are subtler than his. After all, exceptionally fine taste is rare—no less rare than exceptional beauty of person or than a real religious sense as opposed to mere religious orthodoxy. That is why art is essentially aristocratic. It can never appeal to the majority because it requires a faculty of discrimination which most men never achieve—just as they never achieve the highest class as cricketers or statesmen or saints. Remember those words of Landor: "If I had a thousand readers I should be quite out of conceit with myself—for it is impossible that so large a body of people can judge correctly of what is excellent." And literature did seem for a long time to behave like an aristocrat among human activities. There is very little cheap or vulgar writing in our own literature before the Common Man created a demand for it.

I could count on the fingers of one hand the persons I have known who possessed independence of judgement. Nearly everybody succumbs to the fashions. We should always remember that William Blake was ignored, or at best under-valued, by all but a very few persons for perhaps three generations. While we are moving within a fashion it is not easy to see it objectively. Women in our own time look with astonishment and horror at photographs of the women of 1900—at the hard straw hat, the shapeless bosom, the shining belt, the shoe-long skirts, the general effect of Mrs. Noah emerging from her husband's ark; and men, even now, seldom perceive the grotesque anatomy which is suggested by those who wear plus-fours. It has been—it still is—just the same with the literary fashions of

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my time. When the Celtic movement was at its apex, reviewers had no interest in verse which did not refer to Cuchulainn or the Sidhe. A few years later they required that a poet should look at life with the eyes of infancy, having been charmed by W. H. Davies and Walter de la Mare. This, you may remember, they called "magic", a word which duly went the round of the papers; and there they remained until they were suddenly shaken up by the vigorous verse-narratives of the present Poet Laureate. When the First German War was over, they wanted an acrid literature. They turned against the magnificent war-sonnets of Rupert Brooke for the foolish reason that in their opinion the poet had approached war in the wrong spirit. And steadily, year by year, they lost interest in verse-music (which involved the burial of Swinburne) and in architectural grandeur (which duly led to a contempt for Milton). Well, they got what they wanted—the slack form and the tepid emotion of T. S. Eliot and his innumerable disciples. From the disciples they even got the political tendency which they most approved; for just as a Tory prejudice delayed the appreciation of Keats, so has a Socialist prejudice accorded to Mr. Auden and his friends a rapid and precarious exaltation.

We have also had a seemingly interminable cult of Wells, Bennett and Shaw. Only sixteen years ago a critic writing for *Punch* declared of *Lord Raingo* that it is "technically of so perfect a craftsmanship as to be beyond criticism", and that it "will probably become a classic". On the contrary I read yesterday in the *Daily Sketch* that Bennett's books "are dead or moribund." But his work has not changed. If it was ever perfect, it must be perfect, and beyond criticism, still. If it was so far from perfection as to be tedious, what shall we think of a professional assessor of literature who allowed fashion to befuddle him? What —alternatively—shall we think of his colleague who can say that *The Old Wives' Tale* is "dead or moribund"? Mr. Wells was fashionable for at least four lustres; and

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during that time proved himself to be an exciting propagandist of large notions which easily excited the immature. He concerned himself with immediate interests, and has had his immediate reward. Mr. Shaw has been called the best stylist of our age. George Moore, on the other hand, complained that his style is like linoleum—hygienic, effective and quite devoid of beauty. Mr. Shaw himself seems to have been surprised, a couple of years ago, to discover that he had any style at all. He said to me, "Do you know, I believe I have a style of my own? I've been trying to copy out some passages from Sidney Webb, but I keep on changing *his* phrases into *my* phrases." Unfortunately, Shaw is defective in the tragic sense. The result is that he resembles a virtuoso who plays expertly upon a piano which has only the white keys.

And during the period between war and war, how many notable writers have entirely or largely lost their vogue? Dickens, I am told, survives lustily, and it may be that Tennyson has slowly recovered a tenth part of his kingdom; but what of Ruskin, Browning, Thackeray, Meredith, Swinburne, Rossetti, Morris, Patmore and Pater? And what of Robert Louis Stevenson? Very soon after the end of the First German War the papers told me that Stevenson was a dilettante writer—far too "precious" for serious consideration in an age of stern realities.

There it is, then. We are moving toward a period in which houses and clothes will be standardised; in which the tastes of the large majority will prevail; in which distinction of mind will be execrated as undemocratic; and in which the people who read or review books will not observe the disappearance of style any more than they realise that there is now no architectural style in Regent Street. It is already rare to find a reviewer who will tell us whether a book is beautifully—or merely "sensibly"—written.

No self-respecting reader should let himself flow with the fashion. We have only to ask ourselves, "What is the origin of this craze?" and, ten to one, we shall perceive

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that our reviewers have forgotten that literature is an art. It is our duty to inspect our enthusiasms, to uphold an exacting standard in the art which we profess to admire, to make our own discoveries, and on no account to permit the social or political currents of the time to interfere with our literary perceptions. It is, alas, two and a half centuries since a fierce poet said—

> Fools change in England, and new fools arise;
> For, though the immortal species never dies,
> Yet every year new maggots make new flies.[1]

III

Almost a hundred and fifty years have gone by since the purpose of literature was well defined by Dr. Johnson. "It is," he said, "to help us to enjoy life or endure it." We may safely add that the value of style is that it enables the writer to effect that purpose. There can be style or an absence of it in the serving of a dinner, in the *manège* of a horse, in the wearing of clothes, in the execution of strokes at lawn tennis or cricket. It stands, in short, for the most attractive way of doing something and, in addition, it implies individuality—so that, in writing, we can recognise half a page of a true stylist just as we recognise a friend's handwriting on an envelope.

When I was a young man we used to sit up for hours hoping that by debate we might learn to write well—that is to say, attractively and with distinction. We took for granted that we should arrange our thoughts or effects in periods, not in jolting separate sentences; and that we should listen sensitively to the sound of the words which we were writing. We accepted the old-world rule that only a bastard sentence could begin with the conjunction "but". Under the influence of Edgar Allan Poe and Robert Louis Stevenson, we almost persuaded ourselves that, could we sufficiently vary our vowels and discipline our consonants, we might come half-way towards the achievement of style. Of course we were really like art

[1] Dryden.

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students who cannot achieve any genuine distinction because they have not yet become distinct personalities. We were concentrating upon the minutiae of our craft. In no craft can we acquire too fine a skill, but the poetic power of evoking unusual and vibrant emotions is not so much a matter of adroitly using sounds and rhythms as of subtle and emotional world-alliances. Some fine shade of emotion glimmers upon a poet's mind, and instantly apt and lovely words, in surprising association, alight on the tip of his pen—

A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again.

or—

Man is a sacred city, built of marvellous earth:
Life was lived nobly here to bring this body birth.

We became hypersensitive to the snags and the quicksands of our mother-tongue. Even now I recoil—without thinking—from a collision of two sibilants, and have a slight pain in the pineal gland if I permit a head-on crash between two dentals. I believe that we young writers were not at all ridiculous. We were merely regarding prose as an art no less delicate than that of the goldsmith or the inlayer. However, the letter "s" was our hugest bugbear. Perhaps the reader will recall how Mrs. Browning in *Aurora Leigh* describes the talk of some English folk in a Florentine drawing-room and says that they

"tossed about
A spray of English esses,"

and this phrase causes me to remember a Siamese friend who stated that when first he came to England he despaired of isolating any other sound in our language. "You all seemed," he told me,, "to be hissing at each other—like snakes."

At this moment, while we are examining points of craftsmanship, we shall be wise to reconsider one dictum which has been blindly accepted for far too long. It is a matter of which Fowler makes much. Is it really true that when we have a choice of two words we ought always to take the

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shorter? Was Fowler perhaps under the influence of a bastard fashion which obtained in his youth? Were there not Professors of History, active in the eighteen-seventies, who, swayed by Carlyle's admiration for the Teuton, strove to demonstrate that the English are predominantly a Germanic people and ought, therefore, to eschew as far as possible all words of a Latin origin? What a fantastic principle! William Morris adopted it—and thereby seriously weakened both his poems and his neglected prose-romances. Consider how greatly the noble and unforgettable music of Fitzgerald's *Omar* is caused by Latin-born words. Would Fowler have preferred to read—

> You will not trap me with fore-weirding
> And then say that I was to blame,

or—

> Thou wilt not with Predestination round
> Enmesh me, and impute my fall to sin?

Again, if Gibbon had followed Fowler's precept, could he possibly have conveyed to us a sense of the power, solidity and persistence of Ancient Rome? The truth is that a king in the discharge of his many duties must wear many costumes, and that a first-rate writer will be able to adapt his manner to every occasion. Songs and fairy-stories may best be written in the short words which the Saxons brought to us, but for tragedy or history we require a wider variety of tones.

Now, the great excellence of the German language is its purity—the fact that Germany was never overwhelmed by Rome. When we read or hear it, we are back in those dark and virgin forests which even Julius Caesar could not master; but the tough, muscle-bound quality of the language makes it incapable of dancing or of becoming translucent. The least opaque German writing of which I am aware is not that of Heine, but that of the Austrian Hugo von Hoffmansthal. He contrived miraculously to leaven the language.

On the other hand, Latin is, I suppose, the most mar-

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moreal of all tongues. It is in fact so majestic that we may have difficulty in imagining how anybody ever spoke it in daily life; but strangely enough, the Romance languages did not inherit, or could not retain, the bulk and sinew of their mighty original. We need only to examine a French or Italian translation of (let us say) *Hamlet* in order to discern that these Latin-born languages are racehorses, not fitted for heavy haulage. Is there not power and to spare in the alexandrines of Racine? There is; but Racine had the notable volume and the limited range of a fine organ rather than the complex variety of a large orchestra. There are many emotional tones which he could not sound. Or someone might complain that there is assuredly no shortage of substance and weight in *La Divina Commedia.* No, there is not; but the extent to which that mighty poet contrived to masculinise a lovely feminine language is a literary miracle which has not been repeated unless by Giosué Carducci. And even here we may suspect that Dante wished many times that he were grappling with a language not so smooth, not so sinuous. Italian is a language which is always in a hurry, always running away, and Dante may well have regretted his decision not to use the statelier tongue of the poet who guided him through Hell and Purgatory. A very great artist may do much to mitigate the shortcomings of his native language (for he will not be content to "write sensibly"); but the racial limitations of any pure language, whether Latin or Teuton in origin, must inevitably remain.

And that is where we British are doubly-bless'd. That is why we ought to give thanks every morning, summer or winter, that King Harold lost the Battle of Hastings. Had he defeated William of Normandy, we could not have had William of Stratford. It is thanks to the Normans that our language, outranging all European rivals, may be termed the most truly orchestral. Let us not indiscriminately prefer "the shorter word". To do so is to forgo nine hundred years of our inheritance, and half of our good fortune.

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IV

Everybody remembers the apothegm of Charles Lamb that "easy writing makes damned hard reading", and most people will agree that the hard work of literature ought to be done by the writer. He, after all, is like a host, and the reader like a guest, and before his guest arrives he should have set his house in order, have planned the best fare which he can provide, and have seen that the central-heating system is in good order. That at least was the attitude of all good writers in the old days, but there are now certain poets who, in the spirit of the age, dispense with such courtesy and leave all these tasks to their guests. One effect of fine style is, like fine manners, to put us at our ease and to facilitate the exercise of our minds.

I suggest, then, that style is made up of seven principal ingredients, and that five of these ingredients may be mastered by effort and application, but that the other two must be given by the gods. First, however, let us be quite clear that style and expert workmanship, though normally in alliance, are not identical. It is not, for example, the faultless joinery of a bookcase which constitutes the Chippendale or Hepplewhite style, although it will certainly be there.

What are these seven qualities? The five which can be acquired are Clarity, Music, Shapeliness, Continuity, and Variety. By Clarity I mean what our reviewer may have meant when he praised "sensible" writing—that is, writing so that our meaning shall, humanly speaking, be unmistakable. By Music I mean such control of rhythm, consonants and vowels that what we write shall come pleasingly to the ear and shall almost insist upon being spoken aloud. By Shapeliness I mean that, having come to the end of a paragraph, a verse, a poem, a story, a novel, an essay or a play, we should suddenly experience that rare and rich delight that comes from perceiving in memory how well-proportioned are all the parts to the whole. This experience

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occurs whenever we finish a novel by Turgenev. The architectural beauty which induces it is rarely achieved or even intended by our native authors. By Continuity I mean what a motorist means by smooth, unnoticeable gear-changing—and no living writer changes gear more deftly than Somerset Maugham. The best writing is streamlined. Except by design a subtle writer will never jolt his reader, and will carry him happily up hill, down dale and round hairpin corners of thought or fancy. Please notice that I said "except by design", for these words bring me to a consideration of Variety. Smoothness may be overdone. It is even possible to have too much of verbal melody—as a reader might find, for example, in so lovely a work as *The Faerie Queene*. Variety implies changes of volume and tempo—without which you may lull your reader to sleep. Now and again you should clash the cymbals or bang him awake with a thump on the big drum. Those are my five acquirable merits in a writer. And the other two? The two which must be inborn? First, there is Personality—that handwriting of the mind or soul which enables us to recognise anywhere a page of Meredith, a few sentences of Flaubert, a few lines of Dante. But is there any discernible personality in the greatest of all writers? I think there is—I think we know quite well that Shakespeare was ardent, tender-hearted, excruciatingly sensuous, uncertain of the soul, aristocratic in his tastes, uncensorious, and a delightful talker. And the last of my seven desiderata? It is, obviously, one which Shakespeare must have possessed, but it is one so rare that those who do possess it constitute a small class by themselves, the supreme word-users on this planet; and I call this characteristic—Range. Most good writers, even by a strict standard, are soloists, though their instruments vary from the piccolo of Max Beerbohm to the double-bass of Dr. Johnson, but these greatest of writers have control of all instruments and superbly conduct a complete orchestra. For my part, I would name Balzac, Tolstoy and—remembering *The Dynasts*—Thomas Hardy.

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V

Holding these principles in mind, let us try over a succession of styles and determine the extent to which we genuinely like them. Most readers have noticed how queerly the long river of English prose widens and then narrows, loops backward, and is at one time almost turbulent, almost muddy, and at another time glassy and reflective. Not so many have also noticed how our earlier writers were more at their ease in verse than in prose. It is as though men take time to develop an ear for the less emphatic rhythms of prose. What should we think of this extract from Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*?: "And Lowys, if so be that I show thee in my light English as true conclusions touching this matter, and not only as true but as many and as subtle conclusions as be showed in Latin in any common treatise of the Astrolabe, con me the more thank; and pray God save the King, that is lord of this language, and all that him faith bearest and obeyeth, everech in his degree, the more and the less." It has charm, certainly, but our old poet is not so much himself when he is ambling along in prose as when he goes on verseback. Dante's prose, too, is long-winded and strangely amorphous. Even the prose of Boccaccio sprawls in every direction like a strawberry plant.

It is therefore the more surprising to hear, when we enter the fifteenth century, the marked cadences of Sir Thomas Mallory. For example: "So Balan prayed the lady of her gentleness, for his true service, that she would bury them both in that same place where the battle was done. And she granted them with weeping that it should be done richly in the best manner. 'Now will ye send for a priest, that we may receive our sacrament, and receive the Blessed Body of our Lord Jesus Christ?' 'Yes,' said the lady, 'it shall be done': and so she sent for a priest and gave them their rites." There indeed is a passage to please Fowler—but do we not sense the limitation of vocabulary?

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Now when I spoke of backward loopings, I had in mind the tumbling and almost uncouth prose of the Tudor writers who pre-date Shakespeare and the Authorised Version. These men moved, like their predecessors, more comfortably in verse. Take this, from Greene: "But to the matter: the bridegroom and the gentleman thus agreed; he took his time, conferred with the bride, persuaded her that her husband (notwithstanding his fair show at the marriage) had sworn to his old sweetheart, their neighbour Gunby's daughter, to be that night her bedfellow; and if she would bring her father, his father, and her friends to the house at midnight, they should find it so." (*Groatsworth of Wit.*) Or take the *Epistle Dedicatory* of *The English Traveller,* one of Thomas Heywood's liveliest and most bustling plays, and observe how comparatively rude his prose is except when he is writing dialogue: "True it is," he says, "that my plays are not exposed unto the world in volumes, to bear the title of works (as others); one reason is that many of them by shifting and change of companies have been negligently lost; others of them are still retained in the hands of some actors, who think it against their peculiar profit to have them come in print; and a third, that it never was any great ambition in me, to be in this kind voluminously read." I hazard a guess that neither Greene nor Heywood looked where he was going, or heard how the sentence ought to end when he was beginning it.

Even Ben Jonson, despite his familiarity with classic models, occasionally trusted in this way to luck. Here is an example from the preface to *Volpone*: "This it is that hath not only rapt me to present indignation, but made me studious heretofore, and by all my actions to stand off from them; which may most appear in this my latest Work (which you, most learned Arbitresses, have seen, judg'd, and to my Crown, approv'd) wherein I have laboured, for their instruction and amendment, to reduce not only the ancient Forms, but Manners of the Scene, the Easiness, the Propriety, the Innocence, and last the doctrine, which

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is the principal End of Poesy, to inform Men in the best Reason of living." Everyone knows that Jonson did not always write so cumbrously, but such a passage would have been quite impossible to Shakespeare even in his fledgeling days. That early prose of the two dedications may be self-conscious and may not yet be coloured with personality, but it shows that at all times his ear was unfaltering: "I know not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden: only, if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour." This brief passage is in itself well worth minute examination, not only because of its unmistakable rhythmic pulse, but also because of its interesting use of alliteration.

What a keen sense of prose-rhythm and what an appreciation of antithesis our men brought back from France at the Restoration! Is it too much to say that nobody could any longer write badly or shufflingly? Even Shadwell, the much-maligned, wrote speeches that run trippingly from the tongue; and when we come to the prose of the man who snuffed out Shadwell, we listen at long last to a writer who speaks to us in our own idiom. Modern prose begins, I suggest, with Dryden, and with him it has all the virtues. Let us weigh with ear and intellect his fine assessment of Ben Jonson: "You seldom find him making love in any of his scenes, or endeavouring to move the passions; his genius was too sullen and saturnine to do it gracefully, especially when he knew he came after those who had performed both to such a height. Humour was his proper sphere; and in that he delighted most to represent mechanic people. . . ." And what did he write about Chaucer? This: "He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learn'd in all sciences; and therefore speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows when to

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leave off; a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Homer."

The Cavaliers brought back from France a new elegance in the use of English. The Hanoverians, if we may judge by the portraiture of the time, produced two generations of double-chinned women and treble-chinned men, but it was a long while before English prose became equally portly. The reason may be that there was no German literature which might have influenced our writers. What, on the contrary, could be more graceful, more fastidious, than the style of Addison or of Steele? Nor did any man carry more literary lace than Horace Walpole. Even Dr. Johnson—perhaps under the influence of Addison—treads almost lightly in his earlier prose. And when our prose, nourished by Gibbon and Johnson, really began to grow double- and treble-chinned, it did at least achieve a magnificence of symmetry and power. Their prose is quite sure of itself. Each unquestionably knew at once how every sentence was to end. Here is a manner which all men of sense must admire, but we may be more comfortable with the style—equally sure-footed but not so thunderously oppressive—of Oliver Goldsmith.

It is interesting to watch the influence of the French Revolution upon our literary manners. With Lamb and Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt prose becomes much more free and easy. I do not mean "slovenly". Slovenliness, as Touchstone might have said, was to come thereafter. Even Hunt, who might easily have been over-familiar, never quite embarrasses the reader. Peacock and Landor look back, in my judgement, to the eighteenth century rather than forward, like Jane Austen, to the earlier years of Victoria. Thackeray is an urbane and mannerly writer, unmistakably a gentleman, nor could any careful reader, I presume, deny that his equipment was uncommonly versatile; but what ought we to say of the ubiquitous Dickens? If Thackeray *is* venison and a bottle of burgundy, then Dickens is a chop

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and a mug of porter. He had no time, and perhaps no taste, for burnishing his work; and in the exuberance of fantastic creation he spills his porter democratically all over the place. His immense vogue endures. And yet why did Flaubert call him "second-rate"? I suggest a peace-making solution of the prickly Dickens problem—namely, that Dickens is a writer for extraverts and for them possibly the greatest of all novelists. How many introverts are eminent in the multitude of his idolaters? Now at about the same period we had one writer who as a stylist was almost in the supreme class; a man who had at his bidding tenderness or invective, soaring eloquence or scathing sarcasm, and in fact every weapon in the armoury except wit, humour and moral broadmindedness. Few persons now read Ruskin, despite the many-coloured glory of his prose, because he wearies us with his Protestant moralisings and nauseates us with his mid-Victorian sentimentality. It is as though the best orchestra in the world were liable at any minute to play sickly or tenth-rate music.

The work of Meredith, with the exception of his unmatched and unmatchable love-poem, lacks tenderness. It has fire and speed. It resembles the flight of a dragon-fly, fascinating to follow if you have swift eyes; but more than any other writer, except Shakespeare, he thought visually—every emotion was to him an action—and that is why his imaginative shorthand must always bewilder the opposite type of mind. Hardy, on the other hand, had so rare a range that, despite roughnesses in workmanship which no fine cabinet-maker would pass, he is one of the innermost few. Pater, the idol of the 'seventies, was still regarded in my youth as the high-priest of style; but his work has the beauty of precious stones, not of living creatures, and is woefully lacking in variety. No wonder if George Moore, once a disciple, afterwards declared that "In Pater's prose the English language lies in state." And because he said this, it is the more astonishing that in his own long narratives, beginning with *The Brook Kerith,*

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Moore should have continued at the same lulling jogtrot for hundreds and hundreds of pages. I, for one, had to abandon *The Brook* after reading fifty pages because, like Tennyson's, it might go on for ever.

And now, at last, here is a piece of prose so splendid as to be incapable of improvement. The writer is referring to what we may call Human Nature.

"Poor soul, here for so little, cast among so many hardships, filled with desires so incommensurate and so inconsistent, savagely surrounded, savagely descended, irremediably condemned to prey upon his fellow lives: who should have blamed him had he been of a piece with his destiny and a being merely barbarous? And we look and behold him instead filled with imperfect virtues . . . sitting down, amidst his momentary life, to debate of Right and Wrong and the attributes of the Deity. . . . To touch the heart of his mystery, we find in him . . . the thought of Duty; the thought of something owing to himself, to his neighbour, to his God: an ideal of decency, to which he would rise if it were possible; a limit of shame, below which, if it be possible, he will not stoop. . . . It matters not where we look, under what climate we observe him, in what stage of society, in what depth of ignorance, burthened with what erroneous morality; by campfires in Assiniboia, the snow powdering his shoulders, the wind plucking his blanket, as he sits, passing the ceremonial calumet and uttering his grave opinions like a Roman senator; in ships at sea, a man inured to hardships and vile pleasures; . . . in the slums of cities moving among indifferent millions to mechanical employments—a fool, a thief, the comrade of thieves, even here keeping the point of honour and the touch of pity, often repaying the world's scorn with service, often standing firm upon a scruple, and at a certain cost rejecting riches: everywhere some virtue cherished or affected, everywhere some decency of thought and carriage, everywhere the ensign of man's ineffectual goodness: ah! if I could show you these men and women, all the world over, in every stage of history, under

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every abuse of error, under every circumstance of failure, without hope, without help, without thanks, still obscurely fighting the lost fight of virtue, still clinging, in the brothel or on the scaffold, to some rag of honour, the poor jewel of their souls: they may seek to escape, and yet they cannot; it is not alone their privilege and glory, but their doom; they are condemned to some nobility; all their lives long, the desire of good is at their heels, the implacable hunter. . . ."

I would give away all Wells and all Shaw for that one magnificent golden page: and when next we hear the fashion-mongers of Fleet Street say that its author was affected and even "precious", let us hope that before they return to their typewriters they shall re-examine the prose of Robert Louis Stevenson.

Personality is present in all work which endures for fifty years. There is, however, still that one further element in style which divides the Few from the Supreme—that element which I have called Range. It is rare indeed. It is so rare that probably not more than a dozen British writers—in all our long history—have possessed it; but whenever we *do* find it, we speedily recognise that we are in touch with a major genius. Think what it includes! The ability to write tenderly, or with fury; to excel in tragedy, and in comedy; to be a mystic, and a man of the world—or, in a phrase, to be the conductor of an immense orchestra. For the most part, we go to one writer for the masculine virtues, to another for the feminine; but these truly greatest of writers are androgynous, perfectly balancing the male and the female; and if there is one name which burns alone on the topmost peak of literature, it does so because it stands for the extraordinary man who could write *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It* and *King Lear*—a gigantic span of genius. Shakespeare's immense range is, more than any of his merits, the factor which caused his reputation so swiftly to draw away from that of his crowding contemporaries, and never

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at any period to be blown down by the trivial squalls of fashion.

How well it would be if we were always to remember that literature, as distinct from journalism, is an art; and that, as Swinburne said, "In literature there is no Past."

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Chapter Eight

PORTRAIT OF MR. W. S.
or "Guglielmo Scespirio"

I

ROBERT Louis Stevenson observed in one of his later books that for a Scotsman to be carried by sickness of body to the remote and exotic island of Fiji provides an arresting illustration of "the romance of destiny": and sometimes destiny is indeed a deft contriver of what we call "curious coincidences". I am just about to record an instance of destiny in her most romantic mood, leaving the reader to determine whether life is a haphazard litter of events, a tale told by an idiot, the strumming of a chimpanzee on the keyboard of a typewriter, or whether, for those who look more carefully, there is in fact a "pattern in the carpet".

One winter's afternoon about twelve years ago I was happily reading Justin McCarthy's book, *The Four Georges and William the Fourth*, when I encountered a half-dozen electrifying lines. They related how in 1715, after the Jacobite Rising, the Earl of Nithsdale was captured, imprisoned in the Tower of London, and sentenced to death by the axe, and how his lady, Winifred Maxwell, riding on horseback or driving by coach through snow and ice from Dumfries to London, miraculously succeeded against all odds in getting her husband, disguised as a woman, past the sentries, out of the Tower and away to Dover, the Continent and liberty. I knew of no story to equal this one for feminine devotion and courage, although there are certainly many women who would rejoice in such

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an opportunity of proving their love; and so, taking a book with me and hurrying to the British Museum, I waited in the Reading Room and eventually received two massive volumes of family history. They were called *The Book of Carlaverock* and, surmising that in one of them I should find a picture of Lady Nithsdale, I prepared for the worst. Would she prove to be one of those dismal Scotswomen whose peace of mind is forever perturbed by the sins of other people? If so, farewell to the play which was already bubbling in my imagination. Conceive, then, my relief and enkindlement when I saw that this dauntless aristocrat had been physically charming and mentally alight. There and then I became her thrall and, returning home, set about the composition of a play which I called *The Immortal Lady*. You must know that Sir J. Forrester writing to "Mr. Walkinstraw of Barrowfield" in September 1716 said that he had been drinking toasts "with the worthy Earl of Nithsdale at his passing here on his way to Lille, where his deservedly immortal lady has joined him."

The play did not long survive the ack-ack of the newspaper men, some of whom may not have stayed to the end: and I used to pride myself on the finish of my plays, knowing that a dramatist should hear his last lines before he pens his first. Now at the beginning of the fateful year 1944 Charles Richard Cammell, a poet as handsome as his name, introduced me to a young Greek lady and through my acquaintance with her I began to take an interest in the Athens and the Crete of to-day. She had a small son, and when the flying-bombs were at their most numerous and annoying she decided to carry him away into the comparative quiet of the countryside. Somebody recommended to her a small village in Surrey—not far, she told me, from Dorking.

"That," I responded, "is what an American might call my 'home-district.' My paternal ancestors for over two hundred years lived in a village called Ockley."

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"But it is there," she murmured, "that I have found a cottage."

Now and then, very glad of a refuge, I stayed in the cottage and it was during one of those interludes that I heard how Roedean School, at which my sister was once a pupil, had "adopted" a girls' school in Greece and, in order to raise funds for the foster-school, now proposed to give two performances of *The Immortal Lady*. How pleased Lady Nithsdale would be, I reflected, if she could know that the story of her pluck and resolution was to help those Greek children in a time of misfortune. . . .

II

The reader perhaps feels that almost any monkey might have tapped out this association of the Greek lady, Ockley, Roedean School and the Scottish countess, but even if no pattern is at present distinguishable in the carpet, it may yet declare itself.

On a morning early in October I was as usual wrestling with the exigent angel of English prose when the telephone shrilled, and a moment later I heard the dark voice of Harry Jonas talking from Maple Street to Piccadilly, and he was saying, "Of course it may all be rubbish but, do you know, I'm inclined to believe that I have found a quite unknown portrait of Shakespeare. It belongs to a little Italian canon who has a number of old canvases in a Bloomsbury basement. Will you come and have a look at it? After all, *you* ought to know instinctively whether it is or is not the poet. I mean, if ever there was an Elizabethan . . . though mind you," he added hastily, "as a sound Catholic I'm not encouraging any heathen fancies about reincarnation." I believe I suggested that Origen had also been a sound Catholic.

The news was invigorating, and I threw my pen back into its tray, switched off the electric fire, and set out for Maple Street, wondering how a portrait of the earth's most famous

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poet could possibly have remained unknown for more than three centuries. There were portraits, I recalled, of Spenser, Ben Jonson and even Nathaniel Field, an actor-playwright far less prominent than Shakespeare, but on the whole I expected to find a picture of some minor Elizabethan nobleman. Everybody has a notion of Shakespeare's appearance, as for example that he had a domed head, indifferent high and scant of hair, a small upturned moustache, a small beard and a somewhat massive jaw: but our impressions are really based upon two representations, and the first of these is the Droeshout frontispiece to the 1623 folio. We know that Ben Jonson described it as a picture

> Wherein the graver had a strife
> With Nature to outdo the life

but few persons appreciate the ambiguity of Jonson's backhanded compliment to "the graver". As the omnibus lurched along Shaftesbury Avenue I tried to recollect the ensuing lines. Surely Ben says,

> O could he but have drawn his wit
> As well in brass as he hath hit
> His face. . .

which can mean nothing else but that although the picture is in some ways a good likeness it has unfortunately omitted to record the intelligence in the sitter's face. And is not this what most of us feel? Why, Jonson actually states in the last two lines that if we want to see Shakespeare's intelligence (or "wit") we must turn from the lifeless portrait to the plays themselves. The other authentic image is, of course, that of the stout and prosperous burgher who, pen in hand, presides over the church at Stratford-on-Avon. This business-like bust was set up within a few months of the poet's death and must therefore have been a familiar sight to his widow, his two daughters and his two sons-in-law, but how shallow it is to assume that they considered the face to be lifelike. Judging by all that we know of aesthetic taste in the provincial towns of Great Britain we

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ought to suppose that the family would prefer their local great man to look wealthy rather than inspired. Can we doubt that the Widow Shakespeare, Doctor and Mistress Hall, and Master and Mistress Quiney were so much impressed by having a monument in the parish church itself that the details were of little importance? Even Dr. Hall, probably the most intelligent of these five persons, was not sufficiently intelligent to appreciate his father-in-law's books, letters or conversation. He let them all go. Indeed, it is so difficult to believe that the business-like bust could have written anything so troubled as *Lear* or *Hamlet,* so ethereal as *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* so desperate as some of the later sonnets, that there are persons who use it (as they also use the Droeshout picture) in support of their fancy that somebody else must have written the "Works". Perhaps these queer fancies arise only in the heads of people who have no experience and no conception of genius. William Shakespeare was at least the son of a prominent citizen. John Keats was the son of a livery stableman, but at the age of twenty-four Shakespeare by comparison with Keats had accomplished almost nothing. Furthermore, the Baconians and their rivals have never explained why "the Stratford booby" should have been represented in his monument as an author with pen in hand.

I pressed the front-door bell of Jonas's war-shaken studio, fearing that he would take me to see yet another well-fed travesty of him who more than any man was "of imagination all compact". Jonas at once told me that we had no spare time because the Italian canon would soon be conducting an important service in the neighbouring Catholic church, and so, writhing into his weightiest overcoat, he conducted me downstairs by the perilous light of a flaming newspaper, and then shiveringly led me to the canon's basement in Bloomsbury. The black-frocked canon was pale, small and transparently honest. His basement was hung and stacked with some thirty or forty old pictures,

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and on a desk he had placed a home-made illustrated catalogue of his collection, photographs pasted and annotated in a twopenny exercise-book.

"Father," said Harry Jonas in his most rococo style, "let me introduce the greatest living authority on Shakespeare or, as I believe you call him, Scespirio." The canon, happy to find that his new visitor could understand Italian, rattled on in that language at such speed that my ear could only just keep pace with his tongue, and it was with lazy relief that I watched him silently bring forth a fairly wide canvas in an oldish, curly gilt frame. He turned the picture towards me. I saw the face of an elderly man, scant-haired, high-skulled, heavy-jawed, tuft-bearded and with almost black eyes, a face with a hundred meanings and deeply marked by emotional torment. Here was no placid Droeshout idler, no prosperous burgher of Stratford: here was a man, whomsoever he might have been, who was undeniably a genius. He was represented, somewhat theatrically, as holding with his left hand a folio manuscript-volume while with his right hand he poises a quill as though in mid-inspiration. The quill, I noticed with pleasure, had been cut short. It was a working-pen, not an elegant ornament. And when my own eyes met the mere pigment-eyes of that old portrait and saw that they were ten thousand times more expressive than are most of the meaningless jellies that pass me in Piccadilly, I was instinctively certain that, astonishing though it might be, here was indeed the face of Shakespeare at the time, I judged, when he was writing *The Tempest* and was not far from death. Of course it would be difficult—perhaps impossible—to establish the identity of the subject to the satisfaction of the official world, but it seemed to me only fair to buy the picture before we had made any further investigation. The little canon said, apologetically, "I believe, sir, the frame is worth fifteen pounds," and then Jonas and I carried the picture away in a taxi-cab, that proud and unhappy face looking dumbly at us micro-

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scopical moderns. "The left nostril," I remarked, "is very strange. It gives almost a snarl to the left side of the face."

"Examine the Droeshout again, my friend," said Harry. "You will find exactly the same high-tilted nostril. . . ."

III

Destiny had almost completed her pattern. At the back of the canvas there was a legend painted in white and inscribed in elegant capitals. It was in Italian of the eighteenth century and contained twelve obsolete spellings. In English it would run:

This portrait represents the great English poet Guglielmo Scespirio and was painted by the great Flemish painter Francesco Hals. It was brought to Rome by the Earl of Nithsdale, William Maxwell, and given by him to the monastery of Santo Gregorio on Monte Celso in Rome.

Lord William Maxwell, because of his partisanship of the House of Stuart, was imprisoned in the Tower of London (1715) and sentenced to death by the axe: escaping, however, from the prison in the costume of a woman, he came with his wife to Rome where he set up house, lived in peace and died (1744) ever loyal to his Stuart Prince.

That evening as my attention returned again and again to the strange picture, I reflected that the Immortal Lady must have looked at it many a time, for even the severest of killjoys could not question the statement that Nithsdale gave or bequeathed the portrait to the monastery. He was not a man of importance, especially when he was in exile, and the monks could have had no reason for mentioning him at all if he had not been the donor. At the same time a number of problems remained. Did the Earl or his lady (she returned from Rome twice on brief visits to Scotland) take the picture out of this country or did they buy it in

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Flanders or perhaps in Italy? Why did the Earl give it to the monks? Was he indebted to them in some way? Clearly he considered that the portrait was of some value, and it must have been he who stated that it represented William Shakespeare. Then too there was the ascription of it to Franz Hals. Jonas immediately queried that ascription and believed that we might have found a work by Cornelius Jansen: but proceeding with an eye upon the experts who would some day pronounce their verdicts, he said, "Everything depends on an X-ray photograph. I think the picture is genuine and untouched, but what fools we should look if the X-ray reveals a portrait of Charles the First or of some saint which has been cleverly transformed into a likeness of the poet. . . . For the present let us go carefully and say little."

From the X-ray we hoped merely for negative good news, for complete proof that no brilliant swindler had painted Shakespeare on top of Mussolini. Where could we obtain any positive support for our belief? The living occupants of the monastery on Monte Celso might conceivably have some record of the original transaction; and there might also be some record in the private archives of the Nithsdale family. *The Book of Carlaverock* unfortunately says almost nothing about the Earl's life in Rome.

Each time that I gazed at the picture it revealed some new expression, some new facet of an exceedingly complex nature. The sneering nostril which had so much surprised me when I first saw the canvas might stand, I felt, for most of *Troilus*, most of *Timon* and many furious passages in *Lear*. The twisted mouth made me think of the period when Shakespeare was

> in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes

and of his injured pride in having to make himself

> a motley to the view.

The right eye has a forlorn, hurt look and shows how abjectly this mightiest of poets could submit to the caprices and the tyranny of the Dark Lady: and by contrast what

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fire, what excitability, what radiant conversation is suggested by the dominating left eye! In my fancy I could see it "in a fine frenzy rolling" when its owner was writing *Henry the Fifth*: a fervidly patriotic eye it is: and presently, in certain lights, I could see the writer of comedies and fantasies, and he only half-hidden by time and by all those troubles which, so manifest in this face, must have lain, like the wreckage of a storm in some forest, at the back of the mind which created Hamlet and Prospero.

IV

The hunt was up—tally-ho, tally-ho! First, I wrote to a gentleman who seemed, when I combined *Who's Who* with *The Book of Carlaverock*, to be Lord Nithsdale's living representative, and received from him a courteous explanation that he could not help me as he was attached to the Fleet Air Arm at the Azores. At about the same time my Greek friend, who had contributed to *Everybody's Weekly* an article adorned with a photograph of herself, received from an English officer with the army in Italy what our poet might have described as a Letter to Her Eyebrows, for the officer said that her article had so much interested him and the strange curve of her eyebrows had so charmed him that he would rejoice if he could be of any service to her. She directed him at once to the monastery of Santo Gregorio on Monte Celso in Rome, and perhaps in due time her eyebrows may solve the whole of the problem.

Furthermore, I now had a first dose of the official mind. Having written to my doctor asking if he could make time to X-ray the portrait, I had from his secretary the following strange epistle: "Dr. A—— has made enquiries about having your portrait of Shakespeare X-rayed as he cannot do it himself, but unfortunately the specialists will not undertake to do it *as they think the results would be unsatisfactory*." When I add that the specialists had not seen so

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much as a photograph of the picture, a candid reader may be left to supply his own comment.

Excitement began to ripple outward. One afternoon John Arlott, the poet-detective, came to Albany on his way to Broadcasting House, where he was to give in his pleasant Hampshire brogue a talk about cricket, but no sooner had he seen Shakespeare plain than he determined that he would tell the world of our discovery. He rushed hatless along the Rope Walk, and in strolled Sir John Squire, who came, saw and was conquered, nor had he been gone for more than a few minutes when Eric Gillett appeared, bringing with him a well-known publisher. They were still comparing favourably the bone-structure in the Droeshout picture and in our portrait when a mournful and infuriated Arlott reappeared. The Broadcasting Corporation, he told us, would not allow him to speak about the picture unless it had received the blessing of some art official of high standing, and Arlott, all his detective instincts now scenting the quarry, had taxied pellmell to a famous art gallery where he had burst in upon the Director, no less a personage than the celebrated Dr. Granule. "Well, and what did he say?" we asked. "Oh, he said," groaned Arlott, "it cannot be Shakespeare. There can only be the Droeshout engraving and the Stratford bust. You will never find any things else." To this, Arlott cried boldly, "But you won't even look it it, Doctor?" and Granule stated authoritatively, "Shakespeare was not important enough to be painted. Thank you. Good afternoon." But then, not wholly quenched, Arlott with burning eyes pelted to the House of Commons, found Mr. Driberg, the Labour Member, lent him a photograph of the portrait and came back with an assurance that Mr. Driberg would write upon the subject (as he did) in *Reynolds News*. When I reported this development to Harry Jonas he shrank again into a man who, since he had once brilliantly discovered a hidden Holbein, now had a reputation to lose. "Remember," he murmured, "a saint in the act of blessing might without

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much difficulty be transformed into a poet with poised quill in the act of soliloquising." However, a week later the X-ray negatives put all his qualms to rest and he became "the head and front" of our offensive. Moreover, Eric Gillet's friend had been so well impressed that, catching something of John Arlott's enthusiasm, he said, "Granule, with whom I was at school, must, I think, be induced to glance at so remarkable a find. Perhaps I will remind him that he was once my fag."

"That," said I mercilessly, "should bring him to heel": and true enough, the telephone announced on the morrow that Dr. Granule had consented to call upon me before the week was out.

V

Meanwhile, both painters and writers were fascinated by the picture. Most of the painters rejected the name of Franz Hals, and other names which they put forward were Cornelius Jansen, Poussin, Philippe de Champagne—with Jansen leading the field by several lengths: but Keith Henderson, who had seen only a mediocre reproduction of the photograph, wrote from Scotland advancing at least the possibility that the picture might be by Hals. To this, Harry Jonas added, "Tradition is generally right, and we're fools if we merely scout it." "Confound that Shakespeare portrait," wrote Keith. "It haunts me. I keep thinking of it and then looking at it again. The sad, dominating expression, the queerly arresting gesture, the ascending cloud, the centre of interest—the face—away up in a corner of the canvas, the slightly uncanny sense of movement everywhere[1]. . . . I believe it is anyway the youthful work of some good painter. You see, it is undoubtdly an *excited* picture, and one paints excitedly when young, without serenity. And again, everybody's youthful work is astonish-

[1] It is surprising that my correspondent, having only a poor reproduction, could feel this effect, which was one that I had fully appreciated.

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ingly unlike the later produce. What an experience for the painter, whoever he was! I bet he was quite exhausted by the time he had finished it." A refugee expert from Germany gave the date of the picture as "the middle of the seventeenth century," but this did not perturb me since it might well be a copy of a portrait done in, say, 1614.

The writers—I think without exception—agreed at sight that here at last was a face that really could have been Shakespeare's. William Gerhardi was, in fact, soon broadcasting on the European service about "the new portrait": and Hugh Kingsmill, who had come with Gerhardi, Douglas Jerrold and Graham Greene, remarked, "It ought to be sufficient if we five authors were to sign a statement that it is Shakespeare!"

Before Dr. Granule's visit, various friends had sent me books and articles on the subject of Shakespeare portraits, and from these I learned that Directors of Art Galleries have always been pestered year after year by persons who have either forged or believe themselves to have found the true likeness, and that is why when Dr. Granule defensively arrived for lunch I advanced towards him with the kindliest of facial expressions. At lunch he told me that in the Jacobean epoch actors had not the social standing of Sir Henry Irving, Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree or Mr. Noel Coward, and I thought I could perceive on the tip of his tongue the phrase "rogues and vagabonds" but, if it had been there, it was cut short by the appearance of Miss Cox with a dish of appetising curry. The Doctor then explained how literary fame invariably slumps for thirty years after an author's death. Fascinated by this startling theory, I asked him to remind me of the year in which Shakespeare died, and when he had given it as 1616 I looked puzzled because, as I was bold enough to mention, in 1660, when the two patent-theatres opened, there was an immediate scramble for Shakespeare's plays and finally a division of them between the two companies. Dr. Granule, however, was not interested in that subject and was good enough to

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give me a brief and well-informed discourse upon the poet's humble origin, obscure youth and insignificant achievement as an actor. "Really!" I exclaimed, "so he himself acted?" "Certainly, certainly," replied the Doctor, "as you may find if you consult a Ben Jonson folio——"

"Let us do so," I interrupted, fetching from a bookcase the unusually tall folio of 1692, but Dr. Granule counter-interrupted, saying, "So now you will understand that no artist in those days would have had any interest in painting a professional man who was not even a courtier." I murmured a few words about the portraits of Spenser, Jonson, Field, Lowin, and others, but my companion contented himself by saying, "Yes, yes, of course, I know all of them," as, no doubt, he did.

After the cheese, the celery, and the coffee Dr. Granule sighed and intimated that I might now introduce the poet to him. I did so, and he muttered, "Interesting, quite an interesting picture. Yes, you have got hold of an imaginary, idealised portrait, a representation of how some eighteenth-century artist supposed that a poet should look. There are many such pictures. Quite interesting."

"You feel that it could not have been painted from life?"

Dr. Granule permitted himself a smile and then drew three small prints from an official envelope. He informed me that the First Folio had been published in 1623 and that Ben Jonson had written commendatory verses underneath a "figure" of Shakespeare by an engraver named Droeshout. He showed me a reproduction; he also showed me a photograph of Blake's inspired vision of what Droeshout ought to have drawn and, finally, an admirable photograph of the Stratford bust. "Once you realise," he said, "that Jonson approved this frontispiece you will see, as I do, all the tragedies, comedies, histories and sonnets in that noble face with its innumerable expressions. My dear sir, you have merely a fancy-picture, and there can never be anything more than the frontispiece and the bust."

"If it is not Shakespeare," I began, but the Doctor

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parried me by saying, "That is for you to decide. Perhaps it is Cervantes."

"Impossible," I protested. "Any cultivated Spaniard would tell us that no unknown portraits of that great novelist can conceivably turn up now."

"Quite," answered Dr. Granule, "and on the whole I should agree."

Oddly enough, Desmond MacCarthy was gazing at the portrait a few days later and, ignorant of the Doctor's verdict, observed, "It is obviously the picture of a live subject, not a fancy-picture. The poet who sat for it had lost his top teeth."

VI

MacCarthy had also murmured, "It is an excitable face," and that is a characteristic which we should expect to find if Dr. Granule had instructed us that the poet's mother came from the Welsh border. There is no picture of Mary Stuart which in any degree expresses her almost unequalled sexual radiation, and no picture of Shakespeare, except this one, that intimates anything of that ceaseless inner perturbation which accompanies genius. What will be the fate of the picture, which now hangs in my living-room in Albany? Will it disappear from attention like so many of the pseudo-portraits about which I have lately read so much; or will it end in the National Portrait Gallery, enthusiastically welcomed by the Director, and will it be known to unknown generations as the Albany, the Nithsdale, the Roman Portrait?

There it is on a dusky wall as I write by concentrated lamplight in the evening of a day which is almost the last of 1944. There you are (I am disposed to say, being alone here), there you are, greatest and gentlest of poets, man who could so nimbly express the high-spirits of youth and then so royally find words for all the agonies, wild hopes and appalling disillusionments which can be avoided only

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by the shallowest of souls—yes, there you are, looking out upon me across the length of this familiar room; and as I return your gaze, dear William Shakespeare, I recognise how much the beauty of mind, imagination and language which you bequeathed to us in 1616 has meant to me, who have always found life less attractive than it is to most men: whether it was when, eight or nine years ago, I heard your unparalleled verse well spoken on summer evenings in Regent's Park, or twenty-five years ago when, listening to Julia Marlowe as "Juliet", I knew that never before had I entirely appreciated the wonder of English poetry at its meridian loveliness, or, some forty and more years ago, when, as a boy newly-awakened to the lifelong spell of literature, I was lucky enough to see and hear the Hamlet of Forbes-Robertson....

Will Shakespeare's work is to me, as it must be to many others, so current, so expressive of all that I too have known by coming into this world, that time and time again I have to pinch myself into remembering that these plays and these poems were ancient even in the lifetime of Keats, that old Samuel Johnson and Pope and Dryden and possibly someone so remote from ourselves as Milton had read every page of the world's most marvellous book many a generation before it became our turn to discover all that grandeur and delicacy of verbal invention; and as I muse upon the great length of Shakespeare's literary kingship, I dimly see ("in my mind's eye," Scespirio) the generations and centuries of readers not yet born who will cry to themselves ever and anon, "There has never been any writing more poignant, any poetry more breath-taking, and it is somehow as though we too were among the first of its enraptured discoverers." An Elizabethan whose imagination was of unique width and power links us who now love his work with those who will love it when yet another three centuries have added themselves to the past.

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Chapter Nine

A GHOST AT THE TERMINUS

WHEN Leon M. Lion burst in, I was considering, perhaps too curiously, a question of conscience, and while he discoursed with humour and passion about the public danger inherent in any monopoly, I wondered, "Now what would Leon have done? Would he have been nobler than I, or would he have been equally fascinated and quite unable to act as a man of honour?"

We agreed that monopolies are a menace to every kind of liberty, and then I said to him, "Last night, sitting here by the electric rods, I had a strange little experience. . . ."

"Indeed," he cried, "but you're not going to ask me to accept any of your spiritualistic phenomena, are you?" I reassured him, offering at the same time a gin-and-orange, and then gave the following account. . . .

Last night, at about six o'clock, taking up the receiver in order to speak with a Greek gentleman who lives in Roehampton Lane, I missed the dialling tone. Instead of it I heard a man saying contemplatively, "It seems extraordinary. I can't make her out." He had a tenor voice which in protest might, I conjectured, become petulant. He was probably not produced by one of our great public schools but neither had he the coarse accent of the illiterate. I guessed him to be one of those capable young men who, joining one of the Services in war-time, do not take long to obtain a commission. He might, however, smoke a cigar without removing its name or commit a number of equally unpardonable crimes. I could not even feel certain that the

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undermost button of his waistcoat had been left free of its hole.

Then a young woman with a hushed melodious voice replied, "It *is* extraordinary. She seems utterly reckless." "Terribly sad, terribly," observed the tenor, a little patronisingly.

At this point I ought, presumably, to have switched off, but I could not. I was already eager to learn what "she" had done in her new phase of recklessness, and I was completely enthralled by my attempt to assess and imagine the personalities of the duologuists. They were evidently good friends. I said to my conscience (not too loudly lest they might hear me), "Lie down, sir, lie down and don't behave yourself," and thereafter abandoned my ear to curiosity and concern.

"It's so unlike what she used to be," the man was saying, "and it really doesn't seem to matter *who* she goes out with."

"No. When it was only Derrick, in a way he was all right," she answered, "but now there's Eric, too, and Stephen and Bill and that Canadian. . . ." After a meditative pause he said, "Well, I thought I'd like to have a word with you about it. You and she were so thick at one time."

"Yes," admitted the girl, "she used to confide everything to me, but not now. I have to sort out the evidence like anybody else."

"Mmm," he sighed, "a great pity." Then he added, "Are you beginning to feel a bit rested?"

"Mmm, a bit," said she, unconsciously imitating his mannerism. "Of course I still have to be up at five in the morning."

"You do?" The man was as much surprised as I had been.

"It's the only way," she continued, "to get through all that I have to do. I hope *you* are feeling better for the rest?"

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"Oh, I am," he replied almost jauntily, and at this point she made some intimate remark which caused him to laugh deprecatingly. As for me, I was left wondering whether she had to be up at five because she was still a landgirl, though I had fancied that each of them was now released from war-work, when she observed, "You see, we've still no servants and so I have to help at home." That statement, added to her pleasant accent, suggested that socially she must be above the half-way line.

"The trouble is," resumed the tenor, "she's getting herself talked about. People will chatter, God knows, if there's nothing to chatter about: but when there is—well!"

"I've warned her. You know that."

"Yes, and she couldn't have a better friend."

"It's not easy," she said, "for one woman to lecture another."

"Of course not—I mean to say," he ventured, "after all, nobody's perfect and we've no real right to judge anybody. Only, where will she *end*?" The woman half-sighed, or so I fancied, and a moment later the man said, "It must have been awkward, that interview. I mean, we're not exactly saints ourselves."

She made no reply, and presently he exclaimed, "Anyway, darling, it was wonderful while it lasted." I thought she murmured "Was it," but he was apparently eager to end the talk and yet could not find a diplomatic formula. There was, in fact, a noticeable pause before he asked, "Would you like me to come round on Saturday?" I saw him in that instant as one who was rather too pleased with himself. Pleased! though he had not even learned that "Would you like . . ." are not the words with which a lover can begin a sentence. Rather than say "Would you like me to buy you that flapjack," must he not say, "That flapjack is yours if you care for it"? And young men, as all of us agree, must not condescend (even by a phrase) to visit those whom they have called "darling". But what did she

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answer? She said, hesitantly, "If you really want to come. . . ."

Her reply slightly irritated him but, good fellow that he was or that he assumed himself to be, he affected a large understanding of the feminine soul. I was writing him down a prig—but he is far, I should say, from being an ass.

"I'll come along with Eric," he promised her, "after the snooker. That's to say, of course, if there *is* any snooker." A tournament at the local club, I imagined, with Eric as his partner. I was not much surprised when she enquired, a little sadly, "With Eric?" The query brought that other Voice to heel.

"If the snooker's on," it said hastily. "Otherwise I'll come alone." That was better—braver—and I wanted to intervene, crying out to the tenor that Eric was obviously no more than a convenient lightning-conductor: but while I was hesitating, the young woman said, "Eightish? Eight-fifteen? Saturday?"

"Yes, darling."

"Only if you really want to. . . ." His impatience almost fried the telephone wire but, exercising great self-control, he managed to respond, "Of course I do." There was silence, and I supposed the unhappy talk to be over. It was not and, to my surprise, it was he who resumed it, saying, "Why do you ask me 'if I want to'?"

"After our talk last Monday," she said, "I felt that you might have got tired of it all." I hoped that he would now passionately deny such a commonplace anticlimax to romance, but he merely responded, "About eight, then. Saturday." She, however, was being femininely tiresome and she persisted with, "I thought you might be coming from a sense of duty." I could almost hear him squirming, and the riposte which I actually did hear was, "But, darling, we agreed at the very first that there must be no 'sense of duty,' didn't we?" She assented, and once more I expected one of them to break the conversation. After a

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brief while she said, "I *would* like you to come on Saturday. I'd love it."

"So that's all right, Beauty," he told her—or at least Beauty is, I believe, the name that he gave her, though it might have been "Judy"—"and we've always known that it would have to end."

"Yes, we have," she answered stoically. "I hope it will be all right on Saturday."

"Of course,' said he, "I can't tell what I'm going to feel."

"It is our last week-end." He felt that she need not rub it in so pertinaciously. Wasn't he suffering every bit as much as she was? With admirable mildness he commented, "We've known it would come—in time." She said nothing, and then he added, "No later news, I suppose?"

"Lionel's coming home on Tuesday," was her reply: and that could only mean that she was a married woman who had been having a wartime affair with——

"Sidney," she called, supplying me with his name at last, "I shall look forward to Saturday, eightish."

"Yes, darling. We've got to forget everything. . . ."

"Yes. Bye-bye."

"Bye-bye," he echoed, and at length I did hear the click of their receivers—his, I surmised, going down first.

One of the strange points in this experience is that I should be recording it just two hours before Sidney and Beauty have their farewell meeting: and, for all my sympathy, neither of them will be aware that in spirit I shall preside at that difficult terminus. On the whole I incline to hope that the snooker tournament is now taking place and that Eric will prevent the development of a too great emotional strain. Lionel, we may trust, will be happy. He has an excellent chance—for you can divine much from the tone of a woman's voice.

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"My dear boy," cried Lion, "what else could you do? You did not know the speakers and were merely listening to the eternal colloquy of the World and the other man's Wife, mmmmm? But I admit that a very exalted nature might have turned on the wireless instead—as an alternative programme."

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Chapter Ten

THE MAN WHO WAS DEAD AND ALIVE

I

ALTHOUGH Albany is a kind of village or settlement in the very midst of the West End, the inhabitants have extreme respect for one another's privacy. The Coronation thawed us a little, and the bombardment of London caused some of us to become quite friendly; but even after fifteen years the only Albanian whom I know well is the writer Sebastian Lea. We have much in common, particularly our sense that it is queer to be in this world and that this world is not at all likely to be the only one that we shall explore.

Now Sebastian, as he approached the age of sixty, became so ill that most of his friends believed that he would not survive. I knew that he did not much care, one way or the other, but I was deeply interested by what he told me of his sick-room experiences. One day, for example, I found him reading the Sixth Ennead of Plotinus. His eyes, always large, now looked abnormally brilliant because he had lost so much weight. "Listen," he said, "this, I think, is rather fine. Plotinus wrote, 'When the soul is fortunate enough to come close to the Divine Being, or rather when that Being comes close and appears to the soul, and the soul, ridding itself of inessential accretions, prepares to become as beautiful as may be, then suddenly it sees Goodness or God within its own consciousness. There is nothing to part them; they are not two but together and one. And this union is intimated in our world by lovers when they strive to become one flesh. The soul no longer

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feels that it is enclosed in a body, and could not say whether it is a man, an animal, a being of any kind or, in fact, the whole universe. It has no interest in such considerations: it has neither time nor any desire to think about them; for it is gazing only at God and, in so doing, cannot see itself at all. Nor would it give up that experience even if it were offered the whole heaven as an alternative.'"

I have found without exception that genuine mystics are also humorous. Perhaps it is because they are not embedded in life and therefore see that much of the spectacle is pompous, absurd or grotesque. Many of them, moreover, have a powerfully sensual aspect (Blake, Rossetti and Patmore, for example) which probably acts as a form of ballast and as a safeguard against the silly illusions of over-earnest would-be mystics. There was no sensuality in Allan Bennett, possibly because he had little feeling for beauty; hardly any in AE; a fair measure, perhaps, in W. B. Yeats: but all three had a rippling sense of humour. That is why, although I had appreciated the passage from Plotinus, I thought the time had come for my invalid to laugh, and so I turned the conversation toward the subject of ludicrous verses. Wordsworth has no monopoly in this kind. "Sebastian," I said, "do you know the poetical works of John Armstrong, M.D., who lived from 1709 until 1779?"

"No," answered Sebastian, "but I see in your eyes that you are up to something! What?"

"A prescription," I told him, "and surely just at the right moment? According to Dr. Armstrong, you ought to be reciting at the top of your voice, if you mean to march down the Rope Walk as of old."

"Well? What *does* he prescribe?" asked Sebastian suspiciously.

"Let me read," I answered, "from his epic poem, *The Art of Preserving Health*. The doctor recommends moderation in reading. Mark that! He says in fact,

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While reading pleases, but no longer, read
And read aloud resounding Homer's strain
And wield the thunders of Demosthenes.
The chest, so exercised, improves its strength;
And quick vibrations through the bowels drive
The restless blood, which in unactive days
Would loiter else through inelastic tubes."

"I know all about inelastic tubes," cried the patient, "and really I conceive that the fastidious nature of Mr. Aldous Huxley would sooner give up the ghost than endure the ignominy of a bedpan."

I agreed that Mr. Huxley seems less enthusiastic about the human body than the Athenians or the Spartans were, suggesting that he might be a reincarnated Egyptian. They also, I submitted, were excessively body-conscious. "Not in the same way," answered Sebastian. "Mr. Huxley would abolish entrails: the Egyptians piously preserved them."

II

Thinking, perhaps, that our talk was becoming too surgical, Sebastian Lea abruptly said, "But I must tell you of a curious experience which has come to me as I lay here unable to move—unless Frank Mercer,[1] that gentle giant, was free to heave me into a sitting posture. Both you and I," he continued, "must look elderly or even downright old to the young; and yet I have felt more and more convincingly that we do not so much advance through the years as find that the years are steadily flowing across ourselves. . . ."

"Yes," I agreed, "I am already sixty, much to my bewilderment, and when you celebrate that surprising milestone, as I believe you will, let me celebrate it with you! As a matter of fancy, I don't think people of our generation are actually their calendar ages. . . ."

"How?"

"In this way, that the ten years of war with the Germans have been exactly like a nightmare: horrifically real at the

[1] The head-porter of Albany (1947).

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time but afterwards almost dreamlike, a mere hideous interruption of (as Plotinus would say) the life and destiny of 'the soul'. We might rationally subtract those years from our tally: and when we totter together at the ostensible age of eighty, we shall essentially be lively septuagenarians."

"There really is something in what you say," he mused, "though I feel sure that Aldous Huxley or Bertrand Russell would shoo away such a sample of philosophical moonshine. I don't feel that I am almost sixty, but I daresay nobody does."

"Tell me," I prompted, "about your curious experience."

"As I lay here," he responded, "presumably coming quite close to death, whether it is release or extinction, I discerned more and more definitely the manifold skeins of my personality. You remember how Plotinus referred to 'the soul ridding itself of inessential accretions'? They begin when we are born or, more probably, even in the womb. I perceived as separate from my true self the many qualities and tendencies which, like my physical stature and lineaments, had been contributed by my mother and my father. I could distinguish the bits of myself which are inherited and will dissolve away."

His mother, I remembered, had been a woman of inexhaustible energy and possessed of a dragonfly intellectual speed, impulsive, restless, benevolent and so eager for excitement that in old age the divorces of her children were a subject of greater interest than distress to her. I surmised that his witty comic novels might not have been written except for her contribution to his present equipment, and he agreed, saying, "And which part of my work, then, could I not have produced except for the qualities which my father impelled into that 'erstwhile embryo'? I see that you have apprehended what happened to me last week."

I had never met his father but I knew that Mr. Lea had

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been a wealthy Victorian who assumed that the established order of society could never be disrupted, that he had been an industrious antiquary, living much in England's past, and also that he had been pathologically timid, a man who painfully realised the peril of any enterprise. He had stopped Sebastian, as a boy, from practising archery for fear lest "the arrow may go in the boy's eye" and had tried to prevent him even from playing cricket "because the ball is too hard, and one of the Royal Dukes was killed by a cricket-ball." I saw, therefore, that Sebastian's tragic novels about the Stuart dynasty might have been aided by the genes of his father, if genes is the right word.

"Yes," he told me, "and I have sometimes been aware in myself even of his timidity. As a writer I am not at all self-confident. An adverse review affects me, as it did George Moore, in a degree that no measure of praise can equal.... But the true value of my experience as I hovered between life and death is that, utterly apart from all those pieces of myself which I could recognise as having come from mother or father, or even from all their own innumerable forebears, I recognised an element which I had brought with me when I was born. Of course, I know that many people are contented to ascribe all our tendencies and aptitudes to the influence of heredity, and since each of us has had millions of ancestors, or our hearts would not still be beating, it is impossible to refute such a plausible contention: only," he went on, "we have within us a truth-sense. An idea or an experience either rings true or it is a false coin; and that is why the mystics are not able to control politics, banking and religion! Their experience rings true, but they cannot make other persons believe in it. I detected," he continued, "the three main parts of my personality: my mother's, my father's, and—as I believe—my own. Underneath those major aspects there must be countless little scraps from my myriads of other ancestors, even back to the Stone Age and beyond; but I felt that they had become so dim as to be practically negligible. All the

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same, I can understand the murderer, the prostitute, the puritan, and the libertine: so perhaps I have been, in my time, all four."

III

His housekeeper, Mrs. Green, now came in with tea for the guest and Brand's Essence for the invalid. "Oh, he'll soon be well," she exclaimed, "and, anyway, we're here to-day, Mr. Lea, and gone to-morrow, and nobody's going to bother about us after a year or two." This buoyant comment brought us to consider worldly fame. "It's only a toy, a plaything," observed my friend, "and I can't think why people like you and me make so much ado about it. Almost everybody, as Mrs. Green knows, will soon be utterly forgotten, and it does not matter in the least. If we are spiritual in essence, we shall continue to experience the adventures of that long fairy-story of which this life is a fantastic chapter. As for temporal success, enjoyed for instance by Lord Byron, Arnold Bennett and Mr. Noel Coward, it seems to me that there is—what shall I call it? —a kind of success-germ or gene. You see it in certain boys even at school. They are the popular boys, and somehow or other they simply sail through the ordeal of examinations. These boys, in my view, are destined to succeed as men. Everything will go well for them. Others, like Shelley, may have finer talents but, being unusual, will not be liked by the rest of the school. Byron had the success-germ, but not Shelley and not Keats; Fuseli but not Blake; Berlioz but not Bizet."

"And has it occurred to you," I asked him, "that a man of ability, like Croker the literary critic, may condemn all his work to utter oblivion by making a few unfortunate misjudgements? Why does nobody care a pin for old Croker? Because he attempted to crush a poet so important as Tennyson."

"Just as Jefferies, once a complacent literary law-giver,

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sits for ever in the pillory because he was mistaken about John Keats. A creative writer," continued Sebastian, "may recover from many failures: a critic cannot afford to make a single major misjudgement. The work which he despises may send him packing to oblivion."

IV

Sebastian recovered. He suspected that he had slightly anticipated the Grand Climacteric, which so greatly incensed Queen Elizabeth, and he is now apparently freed from disabilities that have dogged him for a generation. "When the Climacteric comes, normally at the age of sixty-three, you either pass out," he suggested, "or you renew your lease of the House of Life." Sometimes he would come round to play chess with me, and on one occasion, after he had ingeniously won a rook-and-pawn end game, he said as we put the ivory pieces back into their cigar-box, "So they have 'ta'en their wages', and now they return to their hell or their heaven. I should think that your Queen's Bishop, the cause of all your difficulties, must be roasting on the grid of his own conscience!"

"Talking of heaven," I said, "I once thought of writing a book about it: long ago, when I was in my theosophical twenties. It was to be called *Dreams of Heaven* and my purpose would have been to show how human beings in all parts of the planet have imagined a state of complete happiness."

"A fine project," answered Lea, lighting his briar, "and I hope that somebody will someday write your book. For instance, the Jewish heaven is made up of jewellery and harp-playing——"

I interrupted him, stating that I had once talked on this theme with that notable composer, Gustav Holst. "Gustav," I told him, "became quite impatient when anybody made easy jokes about harps. 'As for me,' Gustav

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had said, 'I cannot imagine any heaven without music; and if the music was really splendid, as we might expect, I for one would be, as Dante says, enheavened. My heaven will mostly be made of music and poetry.'"

"I see that," Sebastian admitted, "and do you remember how one of the Powys brothers—Llewellyn, I think—could not believe in the immortality of the soul because there was not room enough for all the souls which are supposed to have existed? What a strangely materialistic notion! Even space appears to be mostly unoccupied: but what if the soul, separated from the spatial body, exists in a time-dimension? Time has obviously room for everybody who has ever been born! Moreover, Mr. Powys had not considered your own belief—that the same entities keep on coming back, like the water in a fountain."

"I suspect," said I, "that he was more impressed by the rarity with which people think, love or behave as though they were immortal beings. But let us go back to heaven——"

"Delighted, I'm sure," smiled Sebastian, "for although many of my critics have sent me to hell, none has ever said, 'Go to heaven!'"

How fascinating that unwritten book might be. . . . Hindus of long ago seem to have had an immaterial conception of heaven—it was, indeed, a condition of mental equilibrium. The Chinese have also an ideal of pure contemplation, though prehaps they never had any fervent belief in an after-death state. . . .

"The Greeks, too," Sebastian broke in, "seem on the whole to have pitied the dead, regarding them as desolate wraiths. Plato, I know, had a much more definite conception of the soul and expected it to live a more brilliant and a less trammelled life when it had got free from the body: but he was exceptional in a thousand ways, and he may have acquired strange knowledge by being initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. The Romans took a poor view of the after-life. Doesn't one of their great poets—is

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it Virgil himself?—say that is it better to be a living man in a ditch than a wandering shade among shadows?"

"The extraordinary triumph of Dante," I proposed, "was that he made his Paradise as varied and as exciting as his Hell or Purgatory; and you must have noticed how repeatedly he emphasises the unearthly light which impressed him so greatly in his vision of heaven? He also seems to have realised the rapidity of self-motion in that inner world. As for the Vikings, they wanted to fight and to feast for all eternity. . . ."

"True," said Sebastian, "and it's odd that the Mohammedan Paradise should ignore the military virtues. They relied largely on the charm of women—the houris, I mean. And perhaps you do not know that they set so high a value upon virginity that the houris are said to be revirginated after each happiness?"

I confessed my ignorance, and then reminded him that although according to the New Testament there will be no sex-joy in heaven, women figure as importantly as victorious fighting does in the dream of bliss which the ancient Irish delineated. "Possibly you have forgotten," I said, "the description of Fand, the faery woman, and of her dream-country as they are given in that rare book, *The Sick-Bed of Cuchulainn*? Fand was the daughter of Aedh (Fire) Abrad, and the fire of the eye is the pupil. Fand is the name of the tear which passes over it. It was for her purity she was so named, and for her beauty; for there was nothing in life with which she could be compared besides it!"

"Go on," murmured Lea, "let me hear the old Irish bard's description of faeryland."

It was forty years since, in a rectory-garden on a fierce day of summer, I had looked into the O'Kelly's own copy of Eugene Curry's translation, issued in 1858; but having found it among my more ancient books, I read the following passage: "And Laegh then said further to him relating the happiness of the fairy mansion—

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"I saw a bright, noble country
In which no guile or falsehood is spoken.
In it there is a King of very great hosts—
Labraid of the quick hand with a sword.

"As I was passing over Magh Luada,
I beheld the gifted tree [? gift-laden]:
I passed the flowery plain
With rapid advancing feet. . . .

"Beautiful the women, gifted without limit,
The daughters of Aedh Abrad.
The form of Fand, renowned for beauty,
No one could reach but the queens of Kings. . . .

"I saw champions in their splendour,
With arms at cutting:
I saw clothes of beautiful colours,
Not the raiment of ignoble men.

"I saw the beautiful women at feasting;
I saw all their daughters,
I saw noble youths
Going over the woody hill.

"I saw the professors of music within,
Delighting the maiden.
Were it not for the quickness with which I came out,
They would have left me powerless."

"What do you think of that?" I enquired. "Isn't it yet another attempt to describe bliss which our bodies impede?"

Sebastian, still delicate after his long sickness, had got up to go and was now struggling into his overcoat. "Yes," he replied, "and what about Tir-n'an-Og, the Irish 'Country of the Ever-Young'? It may be that when we die we do indeed become ever-young, for earth-time is only one temporal mode. I believe that all these Dreams of Heaven, as you wanted to call them, are true—troubled attempts to describe what is indescribable. And if they are confused with the pleasures of our present condition,

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what else could we expect? There may be music in heaven, as your friend anticipated, of which the most perfectly-performed Symphony Concert is a travesty: and there may be modes of spiritual union which will make the noblest of sex-unions seem in retrospect clumsy and clouded. Good-night."

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Chapter Eleven

ORPHEUS IN MANTUA

I

In the middle 'twenties, charioteered by a handsome and car-proud amazon, I gave a talk on "The Decline of Romance" to a literary society at Oxford. At this time, so soon after the First German War, most young people saw life rather as a biological misfortune than as a romantic experience, and the literary weeklies were beginning to use the word "romantic" as a synonym for "ridiculous". The audience of undergraduates, however, contained a young man named Denzil Batchelor, already known at the University as a poet and as a boxer, who eloquently resented the suggestion that romance had been put in cold storage for at least a generation.

Having agreed that God must be an artist as well as a mathematician (as witness the bird-of-paradise and an apple-orchard in blossom), we became fast friends; and sometimes during the Second German War, Batchelor, though a busy soldier, contrived to embellish my evenings. On one of these occasions our talk turned upon Italy. We tried to divine, for instance, why the Italians, an exceedingly dramatic people, had not produced great drama. There was Alfieri, of course, a not ignoble tragedian; Goldoni, a fluent and nimble comedian; Tasso, a stylish pastoralist, and Guarini who follows him at some distance. In our own time we have watched the exuberant D'Annunzio and the fertile Roberto Bracco, an Italian Henry Arthur Jones.

"Perhaps," said Denzil, "the expressive races work off

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their dramatic instinct in daily 'scenes'? It is the reserved nations who write their dramas: the English, the Spanish, the Scandinavians. . . . Not many persons, after all, write so well and also talk so brilliantly as Oscar Wilde. Most writers are listeners, unless they are Irish."

I liked the taste of this notion, but just as I was about to object that there are now several first-class American playwrights, and that Americans are seldom tongue-tied, my companion, catching the thought, replied, "O'Neill, whom they so much reverence in the United States, is clearly as Irish as our own O'Casey."

"It may be," I responded, "that the Italians of the Renaissance would have achieved great drama if they had not mistaken the classics. Opera, so I am assured, arose from their misconception of Greek drama. In fact, they might have been dramatists if they had never invented opera."

"Tasso, Guarini and, of course, Metastasio," murmured Denzil,"—they're all superb librettists."

"And what about Angelo Poliziano?"

Denzil said, "I've always thought of him as an intrepid classical scholar. Didn't he publish learned notes on Ovid, Suetonius, Statius, the younger Pliny? And surely he translated the Pandects of Justinian and the Eroticus of Plutarch?"

"But he also wrote, in Italian," I answered, "the first secular play of post-Roman times. . . ."

It was all coming back to my friend's memory. "Why, of course," he exclaimed, "the piece called *The Legend of Orpheus*. I've never read it."

"Then perhaps you would like to hear it—in English?"

He seemed glad of the proposal, especially as he saw from his wrist-watch that he would have plenty of time to get home and to bath his baby son—a pleasing ritual which he seldom failed to perform. I handed him a glass of sherry, and then drew from a drawer "*The Legend of Orpheus*, by Angelo Poliziano, translated into the original metres."

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II

"There is a courtly charm," I began, "even in Poliziano's Dedication of his dramatic poem——"

"Just a minute," Denzil interrupted, "have I got his dates right? Born 1454, died 1494? . . . Good! Now for this Dedication!"

"Here it is, then:

Angelo Poliziano
to
Messer Carlo Canale

Whenever a child who was either flawed in some member or feeble by constitution had birth among the Spartans, they were accustomed, my gentle Messer Carlo, to expose it immediately and not to allow that it should be kept alive, being persuaded that such a stock was unworthy of Sparta. Even so did I desire that this Legend of Orpheus (which, undertaken by request of our most reverend Cardinal of Mantua, was composed within two days, among continual disturbances, and in the vulgar tongue that it might be the better understood by the spectators) should be, not otherwise than Orpheus himself, immediately torn to fragments. For I considered this child of mine to be of a quality that should rather bring shame than honour to its sire and be to him a cause rather of distress than of delight. But since, against my will, both you and certain others—overkind to me—have preserved its life, I must pay more respect to paternal love and to your wishes than to the prompting of my judgement. Moreover, you may justly excuse your wish; for the play, having been born under the auspices of a master so benignant, deserves to be exempt from ordinary laws. Let it live, then—that being your pleasure! But I protest to you that in this instance compassion is downright cruelty, and I want this letter to witness that such is my opinion. And I pray you, since you know how I am compelled to obey and how unquiet are the times, to combat with your authority any one who may seek to attribute to the parent the imperfections of the offspring. *Vale.*

"What does he mean by that?" enquired my friend.

"I think you will understand," said I, "when we come to the end of the libretto: but you will be as indulgent as the Cardinal of Mantua, I am sure, bearing in mind that the

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morals of Renaissance Italy were not those of Victorian England."

"Very well. So let's hear the whole piece without further interruptions from me, or I may be late for my appointment at home. My son, let me tell you, would do credit to any Spartan family."

MERCURY announces the pageant

Pray you, be hushed and hearken! . . . Apollo's son,
The shepherd Aristaeus, conceived such great
And incontrollable desire for one
Eurydice, whom Orpheus had for mate,
That, on a day, by him she was undone
And he, pursuing, caused her disastrous fate:
For while along the waterside she fled,
A serpent stung her, and she fell down, dead.

Then, singing, Orpheus ransomed her from hell,
But strove to keep the appointed terms in vain,
And, looking back at her, dissolved the spell,
And straightway was she reft from him again:
Wherefore to women's love he bade farewell
For ever, and by women was he slain.

(*MERCURY retires*)

A SHEPHERD enters and says

Look you, good fellows, look—a pledge of mirth:
Mercury has come down from heaven to earth!

MOPSUS, an old shepherd

My white calf that has two feet splashed with red,
And red on knee and flank—you've seen him, pray?
The one, I mean, with the black mark on his head.

ARISTAEUS, a young shepherd

The herds, good Mopsus, did not meet to-day
Here at the fountain, but I heard them low
Yonder among the uplands far away.
We'll track them for you. Thyrsis, up and go!
And meanwhile, Mopsus, bide you here with me
And listen for a little to my woe.
Yesterday by that dark cave did I see
A nymph possessed of all Diana's grace,
And near her a young lover—happy he!

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When I beheld that more than earthly face
The heart dissolved away within my breast,
And I wox mad with love: and in such case,
Mopsus, you find me still—so sore distressed
That I shun food, and weep, and may not cease,
And toss upon my pallet without rest.

MOPSUS

If you should let this flame of love increase,
Nor quench it, Aristaeus, before it rise,
Soon shall you see it deprive you of all peace.
Love does not take *me*, look you, by surprise.
I know what ill it works if left too late.
Find the cure now, while yet the cure applies;
For once you make love's heavy laws your fate
You'll have no head for bees, crops, vines or store
Of herds and flocks, or pastures or estate.

ARISTAEUS

Mopsus, you talk these things to death! No more
Squander on me your idle words, I pray,
Lest they go down the wind as heretofore.
I love, 'tis true, and would not unlove: nay,
Nor wish to soothe what can so sweetly sting.
They praise Love most who most against him say.
Yet if you count my wish worth anything,
Out of that pocket draw your pipe, and long
Beneath this shady foliage let us sing:
For well I know my nymph delights in song.

The Song

Now to my sweet words, all ye woods, give ear,
Seeing that my nymph is proud and will not hear.
The lovely nymph is deaf to my lament
Nor cares to hear the music of this reed:
Wherefore my hornéd herds go ill-content
And to the running brook will pay no heed
Nor touch the tender herbage, being indeed
Most sorrowful for their shepherd's woeful cheer.
Now to my sweet words, all ye woods, give ear.

The herds, in truth, regard their shepherd's ill:
Nothing the nymph cares for her suitor's plea—
The lovely nymph whose heart is harder still
Than stone, than iron, than adamant may be.
Even as the lamb that flies the wolf, so she
The further flies the more that I draw near.
Now to my sweet words, all ye woods, give ear.

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Tell her, my reed, how swift is beauty's fall
Which, with the fleeting years, must fleet away.
Tell her, again, how Time shall ruin all,
How nothing can restore youth's fallen day.
Tell her to use that fair form while she may,
Since violets and roses bloom not all the year.
Now to my sweet words, all ye woods, give ear.

Bear forth, ye winds, the dulcet rhymes I make
Till my nymph's ear shall catch them flying past.
Say how my tears flow always for her sake,
Petition that her cruelty may not last
And tell her how my life is fading fast—
Melted as frost is when the sun burns clear.
Now to my sweet words, all ye woods, give ear,
Seeing that my nymph is proud and will not hear.

MOPSUS

Not the delicious murmurs that outspread
When a stone falls in water fresh and rare,
Nor those that in the pine-tops overhead
Follow a little frolic breath of air,
Are easeful as the rhymes which you have made,
That still reverberate round us everywhere.
Like a tame pet, she will answer if she hears. . . .

But see, where Thyrsis down the hill careers!
What of my calf, man? Is he safe and sound?

THYRSIS, servant to Aristaeus, replies

I've got him, yes—and may his throat be cut!
He all but had my bowels tumbled round,
So fiercely he attacked, trying to butt:
Still, in the end I brought him to the pound,
But not, be certain, till he'd had his glut.
The brute, I warn you, stuffed his belly first
So full with hay, you'd think it bound to burst.

But hark! I spied a gentle maiden there,
Gathering flowers about the mountain's base.
Not very Venus could have looked more fair
Or had a sweeter way or queenlier face.
She spoke and sang with such a jocund air
That rivers ran back to their starting-place.
Gold-headed, and with cheeks of rose and snow,
Alone and in white raiment did she go.

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ARISTAEUS

I go to seek her! Mopsus, do you stay,
But this in truth is she of whom I told.

MOPSUS

But Aristaeus, beware! Suppose you stray
Into some snare through being overbold!

ARISTAEUS

I'll either run upon my death to day
Or try what fortune fate for me may hold.
Here by the springhead, Mopsus, do you bide,
But I'll go seek her up the mountain-side.
(*Exit ARISTAEUS*)

MOPSUS

Thyrsis, you see how your good master fares?
Out of his senses quite, his reason flown!
You ought to make him feel, while time yet spares,
To what a shameful pass Love lures him on.

THYRSIS

A servant should obey; and if he dares
Correct the master—why, his own wits are gone.
Beside, I know him far more wise than we.
To tend the ox and cow suffices me.

ARISTAEUS says to Eurydice, she flying him

Fly me not, maid, nor fear
One who is all thy friend—
One who for love of thee would gladly die.
Tarry, fair nymph, and hear
This message that I send:
Nymph, it is love I bring thee. Do not fly!

No wolf or bear, indeed
Hunts thee, but only I,
Thy lover: wherefore check thy fearful speed.
If prayers be idle things,
If still thou fliest before,
I must pursue the more.
Lend me thy wings, O Love, lend me thy wings!

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ORPHEUS, while on the hill singing to his lyre, speaks the following Latin verses (which, according to Messer Baccio Ugolino who acted the part of the said Orpheus, are in honour of the Cardinal of Mantua) and is interrupted by a Shepherd who announces the death of Eurydice

Lyre that once mixed with whatsoever dalliance
Love in his passing taught my adolescence,
Now, as aforetime, mingling with the measure,
Yield a fresh music:
Music not luring shaggy lions hither,
Nay, but most gently lightening our master's
Care-clouded spirit—on an ear so learned
Gratefully falling.
Rightly our lyric, seeking for protection,
Calls on the lord of poets and musicians,
Him on whose sacred hair is set the splendid
Red-glowing helmet;
Him whose divinely aureate brow is compassed
Round with a three-tiered diadem of glory.
Who, then, inspires me? Am I tricked, or is it
Gracious Apollo?
Phoebus, we pray thee, ratify thy promptings!
Fitly we hail him lord of our Thalia,
Since for him only flows, with urn inverted,
Swift golden Hermus:
Since to him Indus, first to look on Phaeton,
Sends thine own sea-shells, foam-born Cytherea—
Thou from whom also gushed the horn of plenty,
Giving him gladness.
Nor, like the Colchian dragon, does he fearfully
Guard the hid treasure. Hewing out a pathway,
Fameward he presses; yea, and to the future
Soars like a beacon.
Lo, how the hall of poets, fair with sweeter
Shade than the shade upon the slopes of Helicon,
Not to the learnéd only but to all men
Opens its portals.
Thus, ever-springing, virtue decks the mighty
Stock of Gonzaga, famed for noble actions,
While the descendant, emulous of honour,
Outshines the forebear.
Much is the parent stem in these rich apples
Magnified. Never came from out the fruitful
Egg that Jove's fleet bird once had impregnated,
Faint-hearted vultures,

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Now let thy waters flow with rushing torrent,
Mincius, frequented by the sacred Muses!
Lo now, to greet you, Maecenas and Virgil
Come—to you, only.
Now must the swan-sweet Po, however proudly
Boasting her stars, her stars and weeping alders,
Count her own many tributary waters
Less, than thou, noble.
Verily, therefore did Tibernian Ocnus,
Taught by the friendly Fate's far-seeing Mother,
Mark how the white birds flew and, having marked them,
Founded his Mantua.

A SHEPHERD announces to Orpheus the death of Eurydice

Orpheus, I bring you brackish news to hear:
This—that your nymph, your beautiful nymph, is dead.
From Aristaeus, who held her all too dear,
In panic by the waterside she fled,
And there an evil serpent, slipping clear
Of grasses and flowers, gave her a wound so dread
That, piercing her white foot with poisoned knife,
He stopped—her flight, not only, but her life.

ORPHEUS laments the death of Eurydice

Mourn, then, with me, disconsolate Lyre; for lo,
Now are the wonted songs of no avail:
Mourn, while around the poles the heavens flow
And Philomel gives way to our sad tale.
O heaven, O earth, O sea, O direst woe—
How can I bear such misery, and not fail,
How may I still live on, bereft of thee?
Down to the gates of Tartarus must I fare
To learn if yonder any mercy lies.
Haply the heavy lot that we must bear,
Sweet cithern, may relent before our sighs:
Haply may Death some little pity spare,
Seeing that our songs have caused the rocks to rise,
Brought stag and tiger close, and to their moods
Drawn the mad rivers and distracted woods.

ORPHEUS, singing, goes into Hades

Pity, oh, pity a hapless lover's lot,
Dark spirits, for ye have cause and cause enough.
Hither by one, one only, was I brought,
Being borne down upon the wings of Love,

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Ah Cerberus, let thy fury be forgot,
Since, having heard what woe was mine above,
Not only thou but whatsoever is
In this blind realm shall make my sorrow his.
Why would ye howl at me, ye Furies? Why
Rear up your many snakes, ye dreaded foes?
Ye would make lamentation, even as I,
Did ye but understand my bitter woes.
Wherefore let one so miserable go by—
Whom heaven and all the elements oppose,
Who seeks for mercy of Death himself, and waits
Till ye swing wide for him the iron gates.

PLUTO, filled with wonder, says

Who, then, is he whose gay-decked cithern mourns
Above the abyss, and with a tone so sweet?
Lo, how Ixion's wheel no longer turns,
How Sisyphus has made the rock his seat,
How the Belidi stand with empty urns,
Nor does the stream from Tantalus retreat:
Lo, Cerberus, triple-mouth'd, is all intent,
And even the Furies hush to that lament.

MINOS to Pluto

This fellow comes athwart the laws of Fate
Who sends not hither flesh that has not died.
What an if, Pluto, with some wily bait
He seeks to snare the kingdom, unespied?
All who this irremediable gate
Have entered, even as he, in living pride,
Brought ever shame and evil. Have no doubt,
O Pluto—some deceit is hatching out.

ORPHEUS, kneeling to Pluto, says

O ruler of all those for whom in vain
Henceforward shall the upper light be shed;
Thou to whom everything descends again
That nature or the elements have made;
Hear thou the cause for which I thus complain.
It was by piteous Love that I was led.
Not to put chains on Cerberus did I take
This path, but solely for my lady's sake.
A serpent, ambushed under flower and leaf,
Took my fair wife, my very heart, away:
And all my life became a bitter grief,
Nor had I power to keep my woe at bay:

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But if thy memory still maintain in fief
That famous passion of an earlier day,
If thought of thine old theft endures in thee,
Give me again my fair Eurydice!

All things to thee flow backward, late or soon:
Each mortal life here pays the debt it owed.
Nothing is girdled by the hornèd moon
But in the end must come to this abode.
Whether his life above be checked at noon
Or twilight, every man must take this road.
Here is the bound of all our steps; and then
Begins for us thy more enduring reign.
So shalt thou subjugate my nymph indeed
When she at length to natural death declines:
But lo, thy hard shears, taking now no heed,
Cut the raw grapes and the still tender vines.
Who in the green ear scythes the planted seed
Nor waits until it show maturing signs?
Let me, then, have my hope once more to friend.
I ask thee not to give her but to lend.

I ask it by those turbid streams that flow
Along the Stygian fens; by Acheron;
By Chaos that set all the world aglow;
And by the roaring heat of Flegethon;
Yea, by those apples that once pleased thee so,
Queen, when from life thou wert but newly gone,
If ye account my plea but idle breath
I'll not ascend again, but ask for death.

PROSPERINE says to Pluto

Sweet lord, I never thought until this day
That in our kingdom pity might have place:
But lo, it puts our whole court under sway,
And all my heart is filled with that fair grace.
Not they in torment here, not only they,
Weep, but Death weeps for such a sorry case.
Wherefore by song, for love's sake, and by these
Just prayers—relax for him thy stern decrees.

PLUTO replies to Orpheus and says

I give her back—but under this provise:
That upward on that blind way you go first,
And that you shall not turn to her your eyes
Till all the long path lifeward be traversed.

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Wherefore, lest suddenly you should lose your prize
A second time, restrain your eager thirst.
Behold, then—to a plectrum that revealed
Such harmonies, I let my sceptre yield.

ORPHEUS returns, having redeemed Eurydice, and sings certain joyous verses that are by Ovid and fall fittingly

Come thou with me! My brows are girt with the laurel of conquest!
We are the victors: life opens before us anew.
Lo. Eurydice, here is a victory meet for a triumph.
Come thou and grace it thyself, sharing the triumph with me!

EURYDICE laments with Orpheus the reaving of her away from him by force

For too much love, ah me,
Both must endure what pain!
By some fell wrath I am torn apart from thee,
Not to be thine again.
Upward I stretch my arms. To no avail!
I sink down, down. Dear Orpheus, fare thee well!

ORPHEUS, following Eurydice, says

Ah, will they reave you back,
Lovely Eurydice? O fate too hard!
O my wild anger! Oh death! O cruel sport
Of heaven! O love that was in truth ill-starred!
Now must I tread this track
Once more, returning down to Pluto's court.

ORPHEUS wishing to return to Pluto, a Fury opposes him and says

Advance no further! Let your feet stand fast.
Now with yourself alone lament your pain:
For words are vain, and vain
Sorrow and tears. For you the die is cast.

ORPHEUS laments his lot

Where is that woeful song which in mine ears
Might match the pain that my deep hurt has bred?
How may I ever weep the many tears
Which for a wound so mortal must be shed?
Past all consoling shall I live my years
Till heaven have overwhelmed my living head:
And since my fortune runs to such hard ways,
Henceforth I'll love no woman all my days.

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I'll gather those new flowers wherewith we find
The springtime of the better sex is crowned,
When most they are blithe and sportfully-inclined.
There may a softer, sweeter love be found.
Let no one speak to me of womankind,
She being dead to whom my heart was bound:
Rather, would any know me, let him prove
His worth by saying naught of woman's love.

How wretched is that man whose every mood
Is made by women, be it sad or gay:
And who, renouncing liberty for good,
Believes their words or trusts the tricks they play!
Lighter than leaves upon the wind, they would
And then would not—a thousand times a day.
If sought, they hide; if fled, pursue the more:
And come and go like waves upon the shore.

This, of a truth, was all the creed of Jove
Who by this sweet and amorous knot constrained,
Took that delight of Ganymede above
Which Phoebus, here, of Hyacinth obtained:
Hercules fell before this holy love,
Who chained the world and was by Hylas chained:
Wherefore I counsel all that wedded be
To make divorce, and fly from any she!

An indignant BACCHANTE incites her companions to the death of Orpheus

A-ho! He scorns our love—the heretic!
Sisters, a-ho! A-ho, there! Let him die!
Wrench off a bough! You—fling your thyrsis, quick!
Get you a stone or flame, and then let fly!
Run you—run, rend from yonder bush a stick.
Smite him so hard that he lack strength to cry.
Tear out his heart! A-ho! Stop ye his breath!
Deal him his death! Death for the traitor—death!

The BACCHANTE returns with the head of Orpheus

A-ho, a-ho! Now is the traitor dead!
Evoe, Bacchus! Bacchus! Praise to thee!
Headlong through all the forest have we sped,
Sprinkling with blood the roots of every tree.
We tore him, limb by limb, from foot to head,
In fragments, with an unrelenting glee.
Let him blaspheme the torch of wedlock now!
Evoe, Bacchus! Take the victim, thou!

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Sacrifice of the BACCHANTES in honour of Bacchus

Evoe, Bacchus, evoe! See,
Bacchus, Bacchus, we follow thee!
Behold, for thee have we crowned each head
With green of the ivy and berries bright:
And in thy service, as thou hast said,
Keep up the frolic day and night.
Bacchus is here! Drink for delight,
And hand on the drinking-cup to me.
Bacchus, Bacchus, we follow thee!

My horn already is emptied out:
Fill it anew from the jar, I pray!
Is it the mountain that reels about
Or is it the brain that begins to sway?
Hither and thither, up and away,
Run you, all of you—run like me!
Bacchus, Bacchus, we follow thee!

I think I am half asleep already.
Say, am I drunken? Tell me, you!
My feet, in truth, are no longer steady.
Drunken I am—and the others, too.
All of you, come now—do as I do!
All of you, drink now—drink with me!
Bacchus, Bacchus, we follow thee!

"Bacchus, Bacchus!"—be this the shout.
Toss down the wine and forbear to think:
Then fall asleep when you're wearied out.
Come you and you—come all of you—drink!
I droop: I can dance no more: I sink.
Shout now, everyone! Eulalee!
Evoe, Bacchus, evoe! See,
Bacchus, Bacchus, we follow thee!

III

The reader, if the subject is not familiar to him, may like to learn a little more about Poliziano. At the age of ten he entered the University at Florence. At thirteen he published some Latin letters. At sixteen the prodigious youth began a translation of the *Iliad* into Latin hexameters, omitting the first book because it had already been well translated and proceeding as far as the end of the

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fifth. A fantastic labour? Not in those days. "The necessity felt soon after Dante's death for translating *The Divine Comedy* into Latin sufficiently proves that a Latin poem gained a larger audience than a masterpiece of Italian literature." More than a century had passed since Dante's death, but Latin was still the European language of cultured men. It is therefore not surprising that Poliziano's amazing feat should have brought him immense renown. It caused him, in fact, to be termed *Homericus juvenis*. At seventeen he was distributing Greek poems among the learned men of Florence. At eighteen he edited Catullus —no easy matter in 1472. In the same year, he composed his *Orpheus*, a dramatic work, which, with one possible exception, was the first secular drama since antiquity. He wrote it in two days. Although his conception of the story would offend most modern readers, the poem is not merely interesting as a landmark in literature, but is delightful in itself and ought to be much better known. De Sanctis, the eminent Italian writer, suggested that the poet had been attracted to this particular fable because, together with his contemporaries, he found in it an apt symbol of the mighty social change through which he and they were living. The savage beasts were the Middle Ages, the singer who charmed away their savagery was the spirit of the Renaissance.

At an early age Poliziano became the protégé, the friend and the confidant of Lorenzo the Magnificent. At the age of thirty he was at once the tutor of Lorenzo's children and the professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Florence. He was sincerely devoted to his patron and in after years declared that "the liberality of Lorenzo de' Medici, that great and wise man, raised me from the obscure and humble station in which my birth had placed me, to the degree of dignity and distinction that I now enjoy, with no other recommendation than my literary abilities." The brilliance and erudition of his lectures caused them to be enormously popular. "The Florentines

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who crowded Poliziano's lecture-room," says Symonds, "must have felt as in the days of the Empire, when Statius declaimed his periods to a Roman audience, and the patrician critics clapped applause." The lecturer, moreover, had to transcend an unprepossessing appearance, for he was ill-formed, his eyes had something of a squint and his nose was much too large. "He represented," said Symonds, "what the Italians had been striving after—the new birth of antiquity in a living man of the modern world." We amplify his judgement by considering a few passages from an introduction to his poems by Francesco de Sanctis. "Poliziano is the most brilliant expression of the literature of that century [the fifteenth]. In him we can see already the figure of the essentially literary man—taking no part in public life, devoid of religious, moral or political conscience, a courtier, a lover of quiet life who divided his time between study and a gay idleness." "The feeling for beautiful form, already so keen in Petrarch and Boccaccio, in him is everything," but "in Boccaccio it is the flesh that kindles the imagination, in Poliziano imagination is a crucible for refining gold." De Sanctis considered that the literary ideal of Poliziano's period can be summed up in the words "idyllic voluptuousness", and he concludes his essay by saying that *Orpheus* and the *Stanzas* are "not the lone work of a writer in the silence of his chamber, but have caught from its customs and public festivals the living spirit of that society as it went by gallantly. Literature stepped forth from among festivals, banquets and dances."

IV

Denzil Batchelor looked again at his watch. "I've just five minutes," he said, "and if you can acquaint me with one small poem by Messer Angelo, I may always remember this August evening. . . ."

"A short poem," I mused. "Yes! one of the earliest of 'echo' poems. Indeed, it is called *Pan and Echo* . . .

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"I call thee, Echo! What dost thou, my love?—*I love.*
And lovest thou two or ever but one?—*But one.*
As I! Not another I love.—*Another I love.*
And why, why lovest thou not but one?—*But one.*
Meaning 'Not thee do I love'!—*Not thee do I love.*
He whom thou lovest, loves he but one?—*But one.*
Who lured thee away that so thy love dies?—*Love dies.*
What doth the snarer, love, of those loved eyes?—*Dies.*"

"How often," cried Denzil, jumping up from the sofa, "have subsequent writers attempted the same effect, but I don't know of a better echo-lyric than Angelo's. And now —yes, really—I *must* keep my appointment. *Vale*!" To this I must add the pleasing comment of the friend who typed this chapter. "It was mean of Orpheus," she writes, "to advise everyone to 'fly from any she' just because he had lost Eurydice—through no fault of her own, in fact through *her* virtue and *his* disobedience to Pluto. But the Bacchantes were too rough with him. When people are miserable they don't always know what they are saying and they should be left alone. The Bacchantes took advantage." And that is my view also.

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Chapter Twelve

TOPSY AND E. V. LUCAS

I

He did not believe in "immortality" and "another world", nor did he expect a literary "immortality" for himself in the world which he liked so well. Most of the many authors whom I have known were (and are) much more modest than, apparently, the public imagines their kind to be, but E. V. Lucas was perhaps the most modest of them all. He was thankful for his popularity because it enabled him to live in epicurean style. Was there ever a man who belonged to so many clubs? It seemed at one time that I was summoned to a new club whenever he invited me to dinner, and I am still wondering why he should once have said to C. B. Fry, "Never resign from a club" . . . ? He was an awe-inspiring clubman on account of his exigent interest in food and wine. Waiters in restaurants and stewards in clubs admired him and trembled before his baleful hooded eyes. Indeed, his occasional severity with waiters could be embarrassing, but we may better understand it in the light of his amusing remark to Holbrook Jackson, "You should always leave a restaurant better than you found it."

As he came of Quaker stock he was obviously adapting a maxim which used to be more solemnly applied to our behaviour in the world; but like most writers of his generation he became a sceptic, although he always wrote sympathetically about the Friends; and the death of a lady whom he had loved without measure increased his scepticism and his melancholy. One of his latest books, *The*

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Old Contemporaries, ends with a chapter called *Silence*: and the chapter itself ends with these phrases . . .

" I have looked in your mirror, but only my own reflection was there. I was hoping for yours, too, behind mine. . . . ' Surely,' I used to say, ' if any of the dead can communicate with the living, you would communicate with me.' But no. Nothing but silence. Nothing but a world made drab by the absence of her."

None of us knows the difficulties of communication through that still crude transatlantic telephone, and E.V. knew almost nothing of spiritualism. If I had realised the intensity of his emotional, though unspoken, concern with physical death, I might not have teased him concerning his scepticism as, for example, when I said to him that on the further side of it he would, in my judgement, have the surprise of his death. Possibly my unfashionable view may have fanned a tiny flicker of hope, for when he sent me a copy of the book from which I have taken the above lines he inscribed it " To One who Believes from Another ". We are not sensitive enough to realise the subtler effects which we may be making on one who is himself extremely sensitive, and I now think that it may have been my certainty that our present life is only a strange dream which led him, when he was on his deathbed in a Nursing Home, to ask me, much to my surprise, whether I would write the cross-headlines for his last book, then in the proof stage. He had such a multitude of friends that his choice awakened a complicated emotion within me which the reader is sure to be able to imagine. It was as though a dying cricketer had asked another member of the team to try out his new bat.

Our shared passion for " holy cricket ", as Mr. Huxley has called it, first brought us together. Picture my amazement when I received an invitation, as a cricketer, to attend a Dinner of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters . . . On my right sat another Honorary-Carpenter-for-the-evening, Mr. E. V. Lucas, whose grim and almost morose

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countenance I recognised at once. He glanced at the name-card in front of me. "You are disgustingly young," he growled. I told him how much my mother had appreciated his articles at a time when I had no interest in literature, unless that word includes *The Three Musketeers*. "On your left." he rejoined, "is someone who will mean much more to you. Another carpenter. In short, C. B. Fry."

He had a queer instinct of trying out people—men, not ladies—by at first being curt and almost offensive. Women and ladies were for him two sexes, and to the former he was indifferent, to the latter deferential and courtly. He was as much liked or loved by men as by women, but we men had to run the gauntlet. When our own friendship was at the tentative period he used to jeer at my hat, a Stetson, because it had a brim too wide for his approval. A little later I asked him to join me at dinner with an elderly novelist who had said that it was all very well but Mr. Lucas (a director of a publishing house) had scorned one of his manuscripts. E.V.'s acceptance was characteristic. He wrote, "It is several years since that novel was (if ever) submitted to us, and in my Publishing House are Many Readers, so that I may never have seen it at all. Nor will I be tart. I am tart only to a particular kind of man to whom I am attracted. I gave up commenting on that hat after J.D. began to wear one like it."

After this we met many times, often at Albany and more often at one or other of those innumerable clubs. Meum Stewart was so frequently with us that in one of his crab-wise notes to me E.V. sends his affectionate greetings to "Ourum". Once, moreover, when I was couch-ridden with the gout I asked Meum Stewart to fetch him a glass and a decanter, adding, "You see, Meum is now my legs." "You have very pretty legs," grumbled E.V.

We were told that the First German War had "greatly altered Lucas", though I suspect that the death of his Lady was the real cause of his spiritual darkening; but in any case it may have been fortunate that he should have died

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in 1938. "I have poor news," he wrote on June the eighth of that year: "Instead of Nottingham, I have to go into a Nursing Home to clear up, by treatment or the knife, dyspeptic derangement. You shall know more when I know it." He had, in fact, intended to entertain some friends at Nottingham during the (cricket) Test Match there, but now had to ask our fellow-carpenter, C. B. Fry, to act as his deputy. I think he died during the match or a few days after it was over. Commander Fry, as he then was, visiting me a little later, said, "Oddly enough, Lady Warner was there, and suddenly she exclaimed, 'Why, there's E.V. going away, and getting smaller and smaller'!" A little time ago I asked Sir Pelham Warner whether this account was accurate. "Yes," he answered, "I remember the incident very well."

When I was sixteen and knew almost nothing of human psychology, an elderly writer[1] blandly asked me, "Have you noticed how people who are going to die talk more and more about their childhood?" Of course I had noticed nothing of the kind, but during the many subsequent years I have perceived how frequently "those who are about to die", though they suppose themselves to be in good health, obscurely begin to give away their possessions: as though the soul has a foreknowledge not cognisable by the brain. This instinct led E.V. one evening to present me with a curious Japanese ivory. It was a small case or étui, enwound with green silk, and it contained three layers of tiny figures who were dramatising the approach to sex-union, the completion and the result—an even tinier baby.

That, I think, is all that a reader need know in order to appreciate the value of the sittings with Mrs. Pamela Nash which Miss Stewart held in the rooms of the London Spiritualist Alliance. Miss Stewart, fortunately, is a shorthand-writer (a fact which E.V. was unlikely to know) and in consequence her reports are *verbatim*—whether or not they contain *ipsissima verba*.

[1] E. J. Ellis, co-editor with W. B. Yeats of a three-volume edition of Blake's works.

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II

The London Spiritualist Alliance is a reputable and well-established organisation, and if a member applies for a sitting with one of the Alliance's mediums he may be sure that the medium is given no clue to his name or personality. The Alliance has published since 1881 a journal called *Light*, and it is from No. 3068 of *Light* that I have extracted the following abbreviated account of a surprising experience.

E. V. Lucas died on a day of June in 1938. I arranged for Meum Stewart to take a sitting at the rooms of the Alliance on February 15th, 1939—about eight months after his death—and we were fortunate enough to secure the help of Mrs. Pamela Nash, a remarkable medium whom I had consulted two or three times in the past. Why did I not go myself? Because as a rule I seem to impede or distort attempts to communicate from the one world to the other, occasionally with distressing results. Now I understand no better than any scientist does how such communication is contrived. We may think it unreasonable, for example, to make an appointment some days ahead with a medium and to expect that any "spirit" with whom we desire to speak will be available; but probably the procedure is comparable with dialling a telephone number when we want to say something to a friend. What corresponds with a subscriber's number, and how do we "get" him? Apparently the best method is to take a letter written by him or some object which he knew well. In the present instance Meum Stewart took a letter from E.V. to herself, keeping the letter in its original envelope. As often happens, the first sitting was by far the best. Indeed, had it not been so striking we should not have arranged three further sittings—on March 1st, April 19th and October 4th. Perhaps the communicator, existing in conditions unlike our own, gets more and more out of touch with us, as a friend will do if he migrates to a distant and unknown

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country. I ought to add, since the subject may be wholly strange to the reader, that a medium always works through a "control". The control is supposed to be someone in those other dimensions and is usually a child or a person, perhaps a Red Indian, who lived in a primitive society. Whether the control is a real entity or a split-off piece of the medium's personality is a highly vexed problem. Mrs. Nash's control is a prattling friendly child who calls herself "Topsy". I have put my own comments in square brackets.

First Sitting (February 15th, 1939)

Topsy: There is a gentleman in the spirit-world who seems to be very interested: a gentleman of an artistic temperament, and very clever. He had a fatherly interest in you. [This in itself is a good start. Topsy, or Mrs. Nash, might well have assumed that the sitter was hoping, as is more usual, to speak with a dead husband or brother or sister.]

M.S.: I have a letter for you, Topsy.

Topsy (taking the envelope): This is one he writted you in the days ago. There is a lady here. The man [E.V.L.] went out rather quickly.

At this point, Topsy referred to matters which cannot reasonably be published. Then she got the letter "E", and proceeded to write "Edward". "There's three initials," she proceeded, "there is a straight letter with the E. [She drew an I] and two pieces that's the same, and he joins it. [She is describing an L.]

For a little while Topsy postponed the completion of the name, and said before doing so, "He was a thinker but he was a quiet thinker and never pressed his opinion on people [True and characteristic]. He wasn't bewildered by the change, in spite of everything. He says he could always get quickly acclimatised [Consider his travel-books] and though he would say in a moment, 'When I am dead, I am done with,' he had an intuition—so that when he

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opened his eyes to a fuller life, he just grinned with that little grin of his [All his friends would recognise that grin —his nearest approach to a laugh] and said 'Hmm,' as if to say, 'Hey presto! I am here!' Nothing seems to surprise him."

M.S.: Was he happy afterwards?

Topsy: Yes, he was, but I am going to say this about him, that he could be morose sometimes. . . . That word "Edward": he didn't use it. Why didn't he? And you didn't call him that. I am asking him to show me. I get something like this [Here Topsy, or Mrs. Nash, held both arms above her head]. He seems to be showing me a W but it's upside down with a piece taken off. I don't know *what* he means! [Topsy then, with much irritation, wrote quite plainly the letter V after the letter E.] He's laughing, and saying, "Don't put the other letter on from the beginning, or you will make me a lady!" [E.V.E.]

He can be a little obstinate, but he does like a joke. Topsy is going to call him E.L. He says to Topsy, "Aren't you going to call me EFF?" [An attempt at E.V.?] He is very abrupt. . . . He *is* an oddity! I always thought there was something the matter with him, and now I know. He likes a bit of fun. I like him for that: I like his sense of humour. He says, "Here I am. I am supposed to have died, but I haven't died for the life of me." He means because the spirit hasn't died: and d'you know, when he was living, did he have anything to do with newspapers? He is showing me something in print. He tells me to tell you that you're very efficient. He says, "I am looking over her shoulder as she is writing her shorthand." He was interested in licher—licher. I can't get those long words, E.L. [This is an attempt at "literature", and E.V.'s comment is astonishingly characteristic.] He says, "It is very concise." [i.e. "licher" for "literature"]. He also says something like janal [journalism]. He likes coming. He says he will have more to say: "this is a new venture on my part. . . ."

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He is still interested in a concern—he again holds up a paper. Do you understand?

M.S. (perhaps thinking of *The Sunday Times*[1]): I might but I am not sure, and I mustn't help you.

Topsy (proudly): Of course you mustn't help! But he is still interested in a paper. He is saying, "Unseen Editor, E.L. . . ."

III

I am not going to argue with imaginary sceptics about telepathy or "antecedent improbability" because, although they usually assume that I am passionately eager to "convert" them, their outlook is to me of very small interest. It is their own concern. Any of E.V.'s friends will, I am confident, admit that somehow or other Topsy or Mrs. Nash had achieved a remarkable snapshot of his curious personality: and Miss Stewart and I were eager to follow it up. The results were disappointing but not negligible.

Second Sitting (March 1st, 1939)

This sitting began with some observations which were personal and private. I had suggested to Miss Stewart that she should ask her first question.

M.S.: Have you any message for C.B.F.? [These might have been the initials of a woman, as well as those of the famous cricketer, Charles Burgess Fry.]

Topsy (having written the name "Charles"): He [E.V.L.] is co-operating with him. He has a joke on him. There is great understanding between them. He thinks C.B.F. is not having too good a time. They were both book-lovers but, you know, I see the country, and it seems as if they liked quietness and peace. He shows me sport.

M.S.: What kind of sport?

Topsy: He shows me guns and water and birds, and I am seeing dogs, lots of dogs. I think he liked animals, and

[1] For some years Mr. Lucas contributed to *The Sunday Times* a column called "A Wayfarer's Diary."

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in his life this C.B.F. is a sportsman. [Captain Fry has done much shooting, especially with K. S. Ranjitsinhji. E.V. wrote several books about dogs.]

M.S.: What does the word "test" mean to him? [The reference is to the Test Match at Nottingham which E.V. had meant to watch.]

Topsy: It is to do with sport, he says. He liked it very much. Not as much as he would have liked it. It ought to have been better. [E.V. may well have been disappointed by the performance of the England eleven.]

Now Topsy drew three stumps, a cricket bat and a ball. The drawing, which I have before me at this moment, is crude and childish but firm and clear.

Topsy (continuing): Why did it seem to concern this C.B.F.? He said it did, but it is only the stepping out. He says, "Tell C.B.F. no l.b.w." I am keenly interested. Do you understand? He says, "I am watching him. I think C.B.F. should be very pleased about that." [Either the drawing or the queer reference to "stepping out" and "no l.b.w."] What does L. A. mean?

M.S.: I don't know. [A.L. are the initials of E.V.'s daughter.]

Topsy: He is showing it to me again. [Here Topsy wrote "E.V.E." and then crossed out the latter E, saying, "He says I am making him the woman who tempted Adam." Then she wrote "E.V.L.", and commented, "He says it sounds evil." This is a point of some interest. Captain Fry had just published his *Life Worth Living*, a book of which Miss Stewart then knew nothing, and in it he wrote, "I was very fond of Lucas, and once gave him a gold matchbox inscribed, 'E.V.L. Be thou my good.'"]

Topsy: He was very fond of you. He says he was a ladies' man, and he says all the ladies were fond of *him*. Isn't he terrible. But he says he wants to make you jealous but he isn't having much luck, although he loves to tease you.... That C.B.F. is a great personality. He [E.V.] is talking now about his garden, but he says he has a grand

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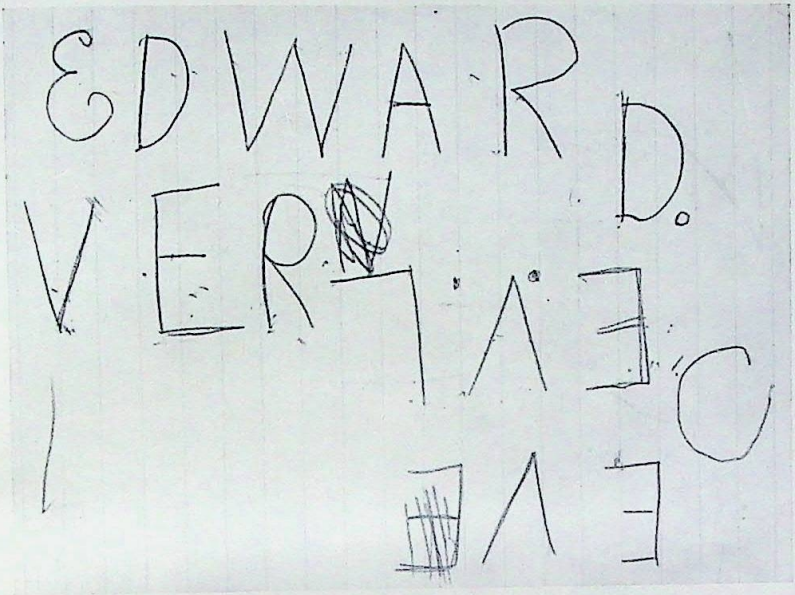

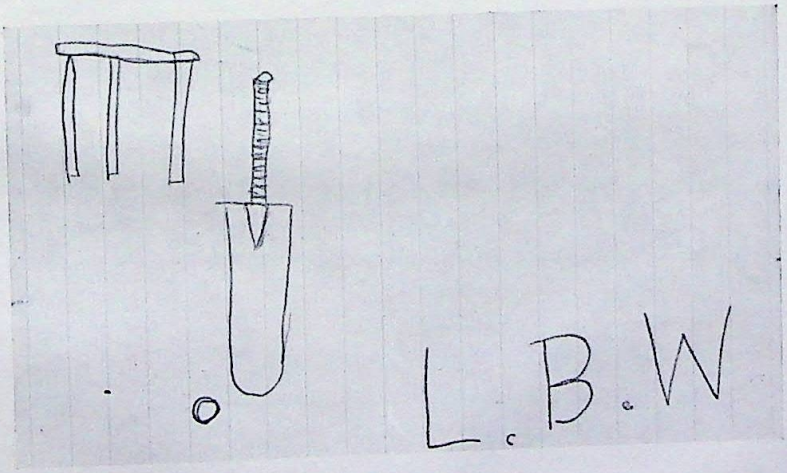

TOPSY'S SCRIPT

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garden now, but he is only just getting acclimatised, and tell C.B.F. he still wants some good cricket. What does he mean? Does he mean animals? "Cricket", that's what he says.

After a little more talk of a discursive kind, Topsy said, "M.U. He is showing Topsy an M and a U. Do you follow me? It is a name. He is showing Topsy it is for you, and the letter U is for you, but it comes in the name with M. He says, 'You are perfectly right, Topsy, and it is her name.' He liked it. He thinks it is a very pretty name and very suitable."

Perhaps the most notable portion of this evidence was the C.B.F.-cricket-l.b.w. section. Miss Stewart knows as little about cricket as she knows much about flowers. C.B.F. must be frequent initials. And what are we to make of "Tell C.B.F. no l.b.w."? This might indeed sound like nonsense without a clue, but a clue there is, though Meum Stewart could not possibly have heard of it. Long ago—in 1902, I think—England won a famous Test Match against Australia (in England) by a few runs: and the last Australian batsman was given out leg-before-wicket. Fry had told me once, and may well have told E.V., that he was at that time sitting in the pavilion "behind the bowler's arm," as we say, and that in his opinion the Australian player was wrongly given "out".

Third Sitting (April 19th, 1939)

At this time Mrs. Nash was not well, and the sitting was a failure. E.V. was reported to have said, "Earnest in all I do, word never broken," and Topsy commented, "It is a quotation or something." If it is a quotation, it would add much interest.

Fourth Sitting (October 4th, 1939)

On this occasion Miss Stewart took with her the little Japanese ivory which E.V. had given me. The contents,

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which were quite invisible, could only "shock" those who feel that procreation and birth are not fit subjects for a work of fine craftsmanship. It played an amusing part in this final sitting.

Topsy began, "V.E., V.E. is the name, no, it is E.V. He shows Topsy an E.D. They are the first letters of his name, and then there is a W—Edward. Then you have to do V. He shows it me with an A. What does he mean? [This may be an attempt at Verrall, Mr. Lucas's second name.] He is very adamant. He is valiant and strong, and when he makes up his mind—— Who is J? And there is an H. Isn't it funny? Did you call him 'E.V.'?"

Then she took up the Japanese ivory, round which I had twisted several elastic bands, and observed, "He likes this. It has a memory. What is it? Is it ivory? It is like E.V.'s name [ivory] but you have to pull the things, he says, and the things come off. He is laughing about it.

M.S.: Does he remember whom he gave it to?

Topsy: It was given to another man, and he remembers him.... Can I open the little ivory?

M.S.: No. I think you had better not.

Topsy (quite astray): No—Topsy knows they are very sacred. E.V. laughs, and says, "That *would* put the cat among the pigeons."

M.S.: Ask him about the person to whom he gave this ivory. E.V. never even gets his initials.

Topsy (protesting): But he is showing them to me! There's a B and an A, and it is a little name, as if it's a short name, as if he called him by it. [This is wrong.] He's showing me two V's, one upside-down.

M.S.: No, that's wrong.

Topsy: He said it was like *that*.

She crossed her fingers. Then, taking her pencil, she drew an X constructed of one upright V and another inverted. Subsequently she seemed to suppose that the name was a nickname: and after this there was nothing more of interest in the sitting.

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IV

The reader will, I hope, take it from me that Mrs. Nash is an honourable person and that Meum Stewart is a most careful experimenter who never offers any hint to a "control". For the rest, we who (for this or that reason) are convinced of survival have difficulty in not becoming a little impatient with the inexperienced sceptic who condescendingly invites us to "convert" him. He takes the attitude that he is doing us a favour whereas the fact is that we do not in the least mind what he thinks. These people, especially those who prejudge the matter by talking about the "antecedent improbability" of survival, obviously assume that we are weaker in our "intellects" than they are, or else that we "believe" in survival of consciousness after death merely because we passionately wish to believe it. They might at one time have considered that a sound course of psycho-analysis could cure us. The man who persistently combats the survival-conviction would do well to examine the causes of his own resistance, but nothing is more unlikely than that he will do so.

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Chapter Thirteen

FASCINATING PEOPLE

I

WHEN the shadows of memory begin to lengthen, it is time to think about packing for our "move". I do not say that there is any scampering hurry; I merely suggest that the hour has come for destroying dead photographs, extinct letters and diaries of long ago. Now I am of those who dislike holidays; and in 1946, when the Second World War was behind us at last, I had no yearning for Switzerland, Eire, Sweden or Portugal. I wanted to remain in Albany, and as luck would have it, my holiday consisted of a dozen-or-so delightful days at Lord's or the Oval, as the guest of Prince Chopra and Captain C. B. Fry. As a rule, we watched the visiting cricketers from India: as a rule, moreover, we were luxuriously at our legs' ease in the Captain's capacious "box". Our Captain secured the box, and our Prince the handsome luncheons, and so varied and voluble was our small talk, ranging from batsmanship to Latin verse, and from women's fashions to Sheffield steel, that the Captain once observed, while the summer rain pelted the Oval pitch, "the less cricket, the happier we are! That cricket is merely a distraction." Of course there were days when we had to subdue our chatter and to mind our p's and q's—those days, I mean, when the shrewd Prime Minister and his gentle wife transformed our box into the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. We were quite accustomed to glancing round and beholding some Homeric or at least Virgilian hero of the game—Mr. George Brann, maybe, or Mr. Percy Chapman; we thought

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little of mere authors and poets as, for example, Mr. Arthur Ransome and Sir John Squire; indeed, we consorted even with publishers and betrayed no unseemly emotions, and once or twice we looked with awe upon a Begum herself: but Prime Ministers are rare birds, and Mr. Attlee, after all, had become the King's First Gentleman at a time of extreme responsibility. We could not stare but we could occasionally take a furtive peep, and my own peeps made me fancy that here was a remarkably quick and accurate judge of men. His kindliness was obvious instantly.

And then came a day or two in September when we convened in that box for the last time unless we have similar luck next year: and having got home again, I thought that such an evening was a suitable occasion for my autumnal holocaust. Presently, at the back of a drawer which contained a Hampstead cricket cap and a "topper" which has often visited Buckingham Palace, though never on the head of its owner, I found a diary for the ominous year of 1938. A world-war telescopes time, and when it has become a part of history many of us feel as though it had been a long and violent dream from which we have awaked to resume a more genuine life. Events of eight years ago seem almost recent, though it cannot seem so far for those who were children or really young people at that period. True, I had forgotten the foreign visitors who had called upon me in September 1938, but their names in that long-mislaid diary carried me at once to a time when the Second German War was a mere possibility which we could not imagine in all its fearful detail.

The first of these visitors was a young Sinhalese and his name was Phiroz Metah. I seem to have noticed that his skull was narrow, his nose long and that his hands were markedly sensitive. He had devised a method of healing which was based upon physical rhythm, poise and co-ordination, and he had expounded his theory to Prunella Stack and other beautiful persons. His doctrine, I found, was that the soul must be harmonised by an expert manage-

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ment of the body but, unlike the yoga systems, it would not lead, he said, to an awakening of the *siddhis*—or minor psychic faculties. In the West (I reflected) we have usually taken the opposite point of view, maintaining or assuming that the soul by will-power must forcibly subdue the body into harmony.

He surprised me by referring to himself as an Indian. "Most of us Indians," he said, "when we first arrive in London go into lodgings and there as a rule we meet with a poor type of English man or woman. We cannot conceive how the English could ever have dominated a third part of the world. As for the women, it takes us a considerable time to distinguish between a titled lady, a shop-girl and a prostitute. But perhaps the truth is," he added, "that it is a rare piece of good fortune to find yourself in intellectual society anywhere on our planet!"

Presently he said, "You ask if I like the English? I cannot keep away from them. Two years ago I was acclaimed as 'the premier pianist of India': not that this means very much, but it did mean that in India I had a happy career awaiting me: and yet, as you see, I have come back to your country."

"And now," I asked, "if you do not find a publisher for your health book, what will you do and where will you live?"

"That does not depend on the publishers," he answered, "because in any case I shall return to Ceylon, where I can soon find work as a clerk."

"But why as a clerk?" said I. And in obedience to an ancient Oriental principle he replied very simply, "My father is over sixty and ought to be able to retire." What has happened to Phiroz Metah, I wonder? The war long since carried us continents apart, I suspect, and perhaps he is now an experienced clerk in some store at Colombo. Perhaps he still plays the piano.

The other visitor, who came a few days afterwards, was a young Pole who had, as I decided in my ignorance of

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Poland, all the rare and attractive qualities of an aristocrat. "Yes," I thought, "he is undoubtedly an aristocrat." His name was Andrzej Mikulowski, he lived in Warsaw, he was composing a thesis on "The One-Act Play in Europe," and he was going back to Warsaw in a week's time. We decided that the best one-acters were perhaps those by Schnitzler and those by Sladen-Smith, and soon afterwards he surprised me by saying, in his faultless English, "There are four million Jews in Poland, and believe me, they are a cancer in the economy of our fatherland. For example, they prevent the simple farmer from getting a fair price for his produce,"—words which sound grimmer now than they did at the time. Then he observed, "In Poland, the aristocracy and the nobility are distinct. The aristocrats derive their titles from Austria, Germany, even England. The nobility is what you would call—used to call—the landed gentry, people who have owned their land for centuries. But you asked me," he continued, "about Polish culture. Our culture could never become German in character. Economically we may have to work with those Germans but culturally never, never, never! We take our culture from France." And what has happened to my Mikulowski, I wonder? Did he go back to Warsaw? Did he write his thesis? Did he fight the Germans? I suppose it is ten thousand to one that he is no longer alive.

II

I had no sooner destroyed the diary which contained these memorials than I came across another, dating from ten years earlier. To read a long-lost diary that records adventures among humanity which occurred some eighteen years ago is at once to realise how illusory is time, for although the world may have been violently shaken and although it cannot possibly recover its bygone pattern, we still can see the forms and hear the voices of the ghosts who cross those dimming pages. There was, for instance,

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an evening in 1928 when that forlorn little spirit, Tony Butts—who was one of an ill-starred family—had invited me to dine early in his mother's house and then to go (with other guests also) to see the Russian Ballet at, possibly, His Majesty's Theatre. The Butts family was ancient and had its modest place in English history. Shakespeare or perhaps Fletcher introduces Dr. Butts as the King's physician in *Henry the Eighth*, and all the world remembers the later Butts who was one of the earliest appreciators of William Blake. A few people may still even remember the strange and somewhat obscure books that were written by my host's handsome sister, Mary Butts—a big-hearted bohemian who died young. Not many will now recall that the young man himself, prematurely bald and constitutionally ill at ease, committed suicide by jumping from a high window in a West-End hotel.

On this occasion, during dinner, he told us about one of his aunts, a lady who lived at Poole in Dorset. One day she broke the chain of her locket and going into a small local shop she bought a new chain, and upon returning she very naturally showed the chain and locket to her maid who was a Dorset girl. The girl took hold of the locket and after examining it for a minute or two observed, "But you know that this belonged to a person who was beheaded?" nor could any expression of surprise or scepticism diminish the girl's confidence. A week or two later the aunt of my friend, coming up to London, took the locket to Spink, the famous firm of jewellers. They appeared to be greatly interested, and they kept the trinket for a fortnight, after which they reported that the locket, which had been "lost" for two hundred years, had figured in the list of precious articles which Mary Queen of Scots had worn on the scaffold.

Our seats at the theatre that evening must have been in the dress-circle, for I remember standing in a fluctuant crowd of people at the top of a broad staircase. Presently I noticed that Tony's round innocent eyes had become rounder, and as I glanced at the foyer below I saw some-

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thing strange, mysterious, tragic and unforgettable. A young man, well-bred, well-groomed, and in full evening dress, was coming slowly up the stairs and was carrying in front of him what looked like a big, exquisitely-costumed doll. He was holding the little figure under her armpits. At first we fancied that this figure was a puppet to be used in one of the ballets, though to bring it through the audience would have been an odd procedure: but as the young man came to the top of the stairs I perceived that his burden was a living creature and that she kept her eyes closed. The head was that of a pretty girl—perhaps about eighteen. The legs dangled helplessly, the hands were the size of an infant's. And it seemed probable that she had closed her eyes in order not to see the astonishment and the pity in a hundred other eyes. The young man, who may have been her brother, carried her to a seat in the first row, and as the seat was immediately in front of my own I was able to observe that she could make no movement except a few faint movements with her infantile hands. We wondered what were her emotions while she watched not a play but the extremest form of physical agility and grace.

This happened on a night of July so hot that I questioned the wisdom of my proposed journey to Naples in two or three weeks' time, but some English folk, if invited to stay in Italy at its most overwhelming, cannot refuse the invitation. However, in London the weather mitigated its magnificence, and within a few days of my journey I went, umbrella in hand, to a small dinner-party at which Edward Westermarck, the world-famous Finnish anthropologist, was to be present. He was a large, genial, hirsute man whose bald pate had a front half and a back half that seemed ill-assorted. Having visually climbed, as it were, up the front half, his collocutor would be disconcerted to find an abrupt new eminence to be traversed. This notable man, who spoke excellent English, was in a gay mood. He told us, for example, that once in Morocco he described to some Moors how " a man and his wife in my country will often

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walk arm-in-arm. Believe me," the professor continued happily, "never in my life have I said anything so indecent. So sickening was their embarrassment that the Moors obviously did not know where to look." Nor was this all, for a little later the conversation somehow alighted on the Faroe Islands, where at this time Prohibition was in force. The islanders, said Westermarck, could get no alcohol except at a chemist's and with a medical prescription. One islander, having been bitten by a snake, obtained a prescription and was accorded a glass of neat brandy. The snake then became surprisingly popular and the chemist's business began to roar. When a stranger visited the Faroes he was mortified to learn that he could not get a drink, but, in the words of the narrator, "somebody very kindly told him about the snake, and away he went to get bitten: but, arriving at the snake's official headquarters, he was informed by the keeper—with profound apologies—that the snake was engaged for at least the next two months."

These jocund anecdotes were followed, after I had been in Naples for a little time, by a wild and romantic story which in Italy a few months earlier had been a nine-days'-wonder. A wise middle-aged Franco-American lady who had once been a journalist—her name was Marguerite Tracy—lived on the Vomero, that lofty and picturesque village high above the immense old city. She took my visit in hand, enabling me even to attend a birthday party which Benedetto Croce was giving in his English-looking flat, but kindly and courteous though he was, I found my interest magnetised by one of his guests. This was Gentile, "the philosopher of Fascism", who showed some courage in being present. Hearing, for instance, that Croce, Italy's outstanding personality, had been visited twice by the Italian gestapo, who had destroyed a part of his book collection, I proposed to "write to *The Times*," but the philosopher soon convinced me that to do so would make matters worse. I could never believe that there was any malice in Gentile.

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And then one evening, after sharing an omelette, some gorgonzola and a bottle of Vesuvio Bianco at the Ristorante Umbro, my friend and I drove in a car to the headland of Posilipo. By this time there were lights all along the arm of the land which connects the Capo Posilipo with Naples; and looking seaward from the Capo we could discern several islands in the darkness of oncoming night. One of them cannot lie more than a hundred yards of sea-water from Posillipo. Its name is Goiola. As a rule, it seemed, there was a ferry-service, or maybe a service of row-boats, from the mainland to the island, but, according to Marguerite Tracy, there was also a strong wire from the one to the other and this wire with its " cradle " was used for conveying goods to Goiola if the sea was too rough for the boats. Now a German neurologist, eminent in his profession, had eccentrically taken a small house on the island, and here he lived quite alone except for the companionship of a young man who was, one might say, both disciple and beloved. For some time all went well in this peculiar ménage, but one day the neurologist agreed to accept a young woman as a patient: nor does the tale conclude at all as we might expect.

The summer passed pleasantly, the lady benefited from the elder man's expert treatment, and both he and his disciple came to like her very well—a tribute to her tact and charm. The autumn also went past with no disharmony in the household. Indeed, both men became quite attached to their patient, and here again the story seemed to be heading to a fairly foreseeable end. The winter was a wild one but the boats managed to ply to-and-fro; and one afternoon the young man and the lady decided to cross over to Posilipo, despite a high wind and rough water. They then went to Naples and made some purchases, perhaps of medicines. As they returned to the Cape they became somewhat apprehensive, for the wind was now a formidable gale and the sea was manifesting its potential ferocity. At the Cape itself they paused to consider their

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prospects, and if there had been telephonic communication with Goiola they would have stayed at Posilipo until the elements grew calmer; but they knew how desperately anxious their friend would become if night fell and they did not arrive. So they determined to get home by means of the wire and the cradle, and so great was their affection for the doctor that they spurned the advice of the boatmen. They climbed into the cradle and set off. The high wind swayed it perilously to right and left. They persisted and had covered more than half the necessary distance when a virulent gust almost overturned them. The lady snatching desperately at the supports of the cradle lost her grip, and the young man saw her fall headlong into the sea. He leapt out, hoping against hope to save her, but both were instantly overwhelmed and drowned. "The Italian papers," my friend told me, "reported the romantic death of two splendid lovers, though in this they were completely mistaken. And when," she added, "a boatman was able to land at Goiola he found that the German neurologist had put a revolver into his mouth and killed himself." Did he know that his friends were drowned or did he assume in misery that they had betrayed him?

III

A few days after my destruction of these old diaries, I heard Dr. Chopra's genial voice on the telephone. He prefers to be called Doctor, perhaps because he is justifiably sensible of his attainments as a scientist; and although he must have divined at our first meeting that I am the least scientific of men, he seemed also to have apprehended quickly that throughout my days I have been more than merely interested in the old philosophies of India. Philosophy ought to be much more than an intellectual amusement.

The Doctor thought that the suspension of cricket should not involve a suspension of friendship, and he invited

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me to have dinner in his home. It was on that evening that I heard the most remarkable story which has ever been told to me—if I except the absurd fancies of certain would-be occultists. The story, he said, was one that he hardly ever related because, though it seemed natural enough in India, it sounded quite unbelievable in the West.

His father, whom I will call the Old Prince, was at once an outstanding mathematician and a man of saintly mind and character. The Doctor had been brought up to adopt the philosophical conceptions of the Vedanta but in his teens, like so many keen-brained young men in most parts of the world, he had rebelled against the ideas of his forebears, nor is it too much to say that,

In the mad pride of intellectuality,

he would then have called himself a scientific materialist.

Now one day his father proposed that the two of them should make a journey to a remote and densely forested corner of the country; so they set out by railway until they came to a small station at which the railway ended. It was, of course, the Old Prince's custom to meditate early in each morning, much as the true Englishman takes his morning bath, and the son (our Doctor of Science as he subsequently became) a little unwillingly and with sceptism in his heart made a show of continuing the ancient practice. His thoughts, however, revolved not round the idea of Brahma or the approaching end of the Kali-Yuga or the Jewel in the Lotus but round the potential properties of steel—the metal—and he became more and more eager to visit the West and there to master the science of metallurgy.

The father and son, having come to the end of the railway and to the last post office which they would find until they returned, made a further journey of forty miles, but this time on elephants; and the elephants lumbered onward through country which became continuously wilder and lonelier. In fact, the mountains, the forests, the birds and insects and serpents had the world to themselves, and there

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was no sound of industry anywhere, no rumble of traffic, nothing but the sky and the earth as they had existed for many thousands of years. Onward the travellers proceeded, the one musing on the soul, the other on minerals and alloys, until—far indeed from the railway and the post office—they descended from their huge and kindly carriers and wandered silently for a little way into the forest. Presently they saw a holy man who was in deep meditation or samadhi. He was sitting in front of a small fire; his eyes were closed; and he was obviously at an immense distance from the world of business and politics.

"Let us sit down near to him," said the Old Prince quietly, "and when he returns from his meditation we may hear something of value." They certainly did. And I have no doubt at all that, being within close range of an extraordinary consciousness, they—even the young sceptic—felt their own minds being mysteriously tuned up. This experience was so notable to myself when I heard a Buddhist monk "expound the dharma" in my then-time studio that not only do I recall it after a quarter of a century but it also made me realise what must have happened all the time to those who were fortunate enough to be in close association with the Christ or the Buddha.

Presently the Saint, if I may call him so, did open his eyes on our familiar world, and looking at the younger man he asked, "What can I tell you?" "I am afraid," my friend responded, "that I have travelled a long way from the old beliefs of our country."

The Saint answered, "And what would you think if I told you that I am free from Time and Space?"

The young scientist politely and courageously said, "I should think, sir, that you were deluded."

Now it is held by all true mystics in the Orient (for Japanese monks, if genuine, would also uphold this instruction from the Buddha) that they must not perform wonders unless they have a sufficient reason. the principle being that a little knowledge of spiritual realities is likely to make the

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knower suppose that he knows much more than in fact he does: and that is why the Old Prince was surprised when the Saint observed, "Find out for yourself whether I have spoken the truth. What can I tell you that would satisfy you concerning my claim to be free of Time and Space?"

"Can you tell me," rejoined the young man, "what will be the subject of the leader in to-morrow's *Times*?"

"The subject of that leader," said the Saint, "will be a new project for irrigating the country round about ——. When you go back to the world of railways and post-offices, remember what I have said." Then, seeing that his visitor was trying to excogitate some rational explanation of this foreknowledge, if by chance it should prove sound, the Saint continued, "I have not done enough for you. Would you like to see a copy of *The Times* for to-morrow?" And so saying, he handed to the astonished sceptic a copy of the paper as it would appear in London on the following day. The leader was there.

After a little while he asked, "Is there anything else?"

"Yes, sir," answered my friend, "may I ask you how old you are?"

"You mean, how old am I in this body? About three hundred years."

When the Old Prince, who must have felt himself to be quite a youngster, enquired why the Saint had given such an astounding manifestation of his powers, the latter replied, "This young man will live most of his life in the Western world, and I want him never to forget that the world of the Spirit is for ever around him." Then, with amusing simplicity, he said to the Old Prince, "Is Queen Victoria still on the throne of England?" "She is," said the Prince, "but how is it that you need to ask me?" "Because," responded the Saint, "it is not a matter which concerns me deeply."

"D'you suppose that anybody would believe that experience?" asked the Doctor, turning to me as we sat there in his living-room in Kensington. "Nevertheless," he

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added, "even in the thick of my scientific affairs in England, America and Italy, it has always reminded me that there are continents of reality which we have yet to discover."

I need only add that the Doctor is the last man to play upon the credulity of a friend or to make frivolous use of profound material.

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Chapter Fifteen

ENVOI

OF LONG AGO

Those towering sycamores and chestnut trees
That in our garden up at Hampstead grew
May once have made a part
Of some fine eighteenth-century avenue,
And still my mind's eye sees
Their majesty of branches, felled so long ago.
Nothing knew I of Art,
Being well content with toys,
Nor did I even know
What devilry may lurk in star-eyed boys;
Yet in the adult world Beardsley still drew
Lascivious loveliness by candlelight,
And Wit's proud dragonfly with shattered tail
Languished in Reading Gaol.

War was a memory, almost out of sight;
But pouter-pigeon Soldiers of the Queen,
Round-capped, red-coated and with swagger sticks,
Dotted the London scene
In that thrice-royal summer of eighteen-ninety-six.
There must have been lewd louts and drunken drabs,
Though at this halcyon date
They had not learned to hate
The silk hats in the jingling hansom-cabs.
How much had yet to be
Which then no man could see—
World-wasting wars, with millions bogged so deep
That they can strive only for food and sleep.

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I cannot now have long
To see this earth which might have been so fair
If they that have poor skill
Would work for men of vigorous brain and will,
Nor greedily declare
That the weak runner must handicap the strong.
What will the world be like, that world I shall not know?
There may be neither high nor low;
Splendour may quite depart,
And the loud mob direct a worthless Art:
Or the bemused Earth-spirit may then recall
That men, like planets, must be great and small.
Did Epictetus rave
To find himself a slave?
Was old shrewd Socrates, the midwife's child,
Envious of Plato's aristocratic birth?
Perhaps the age to come,
After so much that will be fierce and wild,
May labour for the honour of this Earth,
And live by genius, not by dismal rule of thumb.

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